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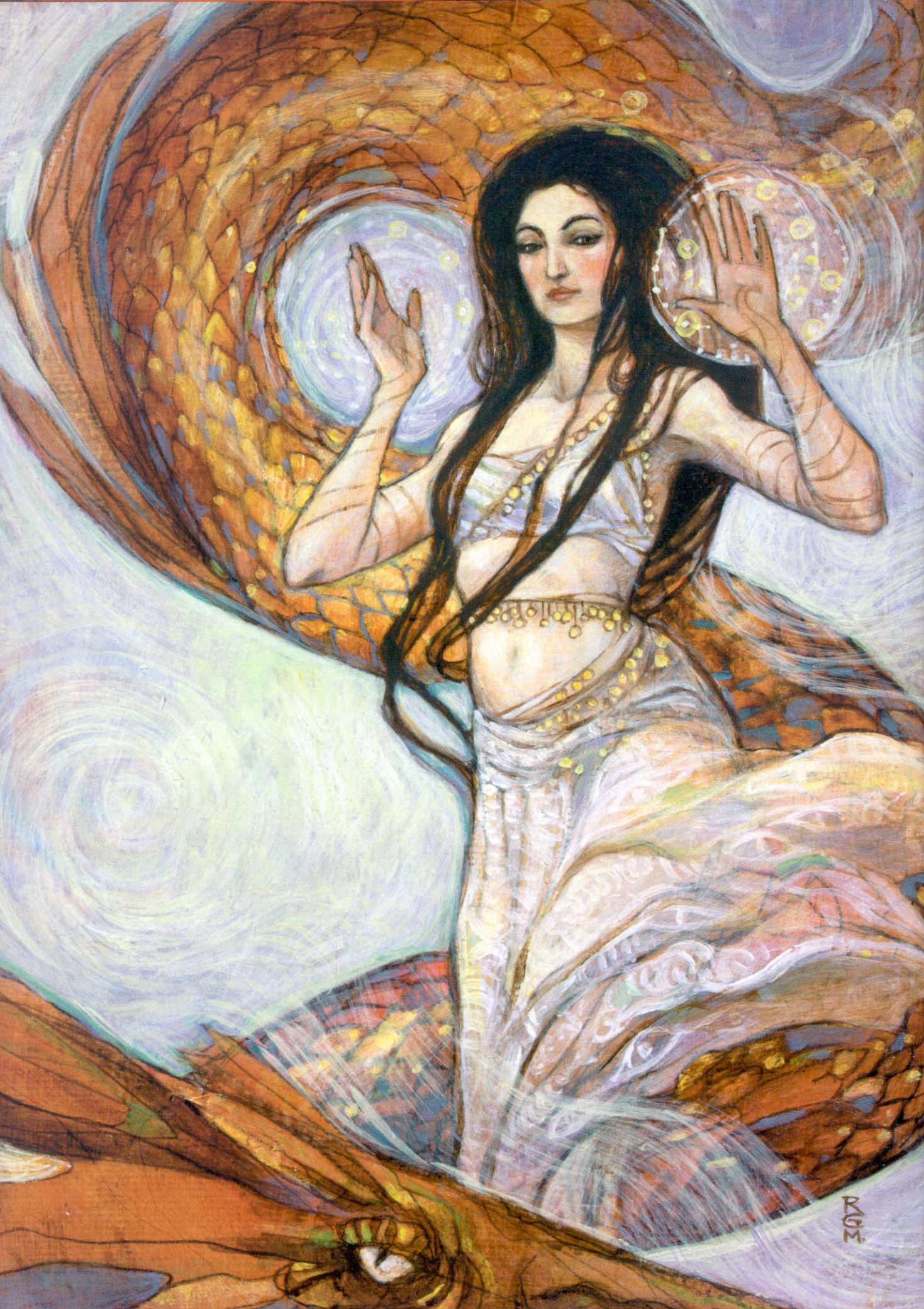
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DRAGON Issue 280
February 2001

GAME ROOM

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When Rebecca Guay first began the cover she had very little to go on. The only information she'd been supplied was the sorcerous theme and the suggestion that the subject be "doing something cool, like casting a spell."

Rebecca renders her vivacious subject with an impressionistic confidence. I feel she captures the isolation that most sorcerers must endure. Her painting suggests the loneliness of Van Gogh while remaining decorative. The wyrm's serpentine arrangement mirrors her figure and keeps my eyes easily travelling over the entire piece.

—Peter Whitley, Art Director

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I can remember purchasing comic books that proudly announced that they were "Still 10 Cents." The superhero comics had already raised their prices to 12 cents apiece, citing the usual blend of higher production costs (printing, paper, distribution margins, and so on). Fortunately, I could always borrow superhero comics at my cousins' houses, so I could continue buying the Dell and Gold Key comics with my favorite animated cartoon characters.

Of course, what I began to notice was that Dell and Gold Key were reusing material at a much higher frequency than the superhero comics were. Even as a young child, it began to register that I was saving my two cents per issue, but seemed to be getting fewer new stories and fewer total pages. It was a lesson I have only forgotten on those occasions when I doomed myself to sobering disappointment by going for price over value.

Naturally, you know where I'm going with this. I'm going to try to convince you that the extra dollar you now pay for *DRAGON Magazine* is worth it. I'm going to suggest that the value overshadows the price increase. If you're one of our almost 20,000 subscribers, the value is definitely worth it, because we haven't raised subscription prices . . . yet. If you buy *DRAGON* off the newsstand, you're bound to wonder where the value resides.

In this and upcoming issues of *DRAGON* and *DUNGEON*, you'll get a two-sided dungeon tile to use in making random dungeon terrain. Plus, we're planning to provide at least two *DRAGON* CD-ROMs as bonus features in your magazine this year. Each will come complete with an unpublished *DUNGEON* adventure, some handy electronic utilities, printable "PC Portraits," complete and revised versions of popular features, and more.

And that's not all! (Shouldn't I follow this up with a question like, "Now, how much would you pay for a *DRAGON* magazine?" Naah! Too cliché even for a publisher!) We plan to publish two supplementary magazines that you'll get along with *DRAGON* for the same cover price. These supplemental magazines will cover games using the d20 System, as well as Open Gaming License games outside of the fantasy genre. In this way, you won't be cheated out of DUNGEONS & DRAGONS coverage, but you'll get bonus coverage for the same price. If you don't like it, you can toss the bonus magazines.

At Wizards of the Coast, we know that nobody likes a price increase. We just hope you like what you're buying. We certainly believe you will.

Johnny L. Wilson

Johnny L. Wilson • Group Publisher
DRAGON, DUNGEON, STAR WARS Gamer, and *STAR WARS Insider Magazines*

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SCALE MAIL

This month's plunge into the mailbag produces raves from Denmark, a font of font knowledge, an apology from the Art Director, some father-and-son gaming adventures, and a fruitcake—as well as our first and (we promise) last Indecision 2000 joke.

KEEP IN TOUCH!

To share your opinions on this issue of the magazine, post a letter to:

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Big in Denmark

Upon reading issue #277 I simply had to drop a line to give you a piece of my mind.

"How You Play the Game" by Tracy Hickman is absolutely, positively, and without a doubt the best article I have ever read in your fine publication. (I have been with you for the past twelve years.) Never before have I read something that made me dream of ways to kill my own PCs just to make a difference on gaming night. Please convey my most sincere thanks to Mr. Hickman for doing an outstanding job on the article.

Leif F. Alveen • Klarup, Denmark

Tracy's article has garnered plenty of praise, and not just from the land of Hamlet and Havarti. We aren't surprised that the co-designer of such classic adventures as Ravenloft *and* Pharoah *knows a thing or two about running a fun adventure, but we've asked him to prove it yet again. Watch for his new* Dragonlance *adventure, "Anvil of Time," in an upcoming issue of* Dungeon Magazine.

Expert Witness

When trying to make a point, I have noticed that many folks state they are experts when, in actuality, they are not. I am *not* one of those people. I spent most of my college years taking design and graphics classes in Colorado, I do freelance commercial artwork, and I work as a font operator at a television station in Florida, so I am informed in what I am about to say.

Before reading "Scale Mail" in issue #277 of *Dragon Magazine,* I was appreciating the bizarre fonts used in some areas of both *Dungeon* #82 and *Dragon* #277. I have even gone so far as to approximate them on our computer at work (not for any newscasts I assure you—they would not be appropriate). Then after reading the reports made in *Dragon* #277, I must say that I became worried. Would they stop using those font styles because of one letter? So I am writing a "pro-font" letter to cancel the "con" one out.

Fonts are crazy and bizarre things in that they have to be appropriate for whatever medium they are used for. One cannot use a font just because it looks cool. For television, the obscure fonts you have used (Wrongfont and Replicant are cases in point) would not work. The audience we produce for would not be able to comprehend the quirky letters as fast as we would have them up (for about 2-3 seconds). For television, plain blocky letters are best.

However, your usage of these typestyles in your magazines not only gives flavor to the areas in which they are used but also they give the magazine character apart from other magazines like it (although there are none like it, in my book). Mr. Loya made it seem that the aforementioned fonts were used throughout the magazine, making it very hard to read. They were, in fact, not used throughout the magazine. The areas in which the fonts were placed were thought out, planned for, and the letters were easy to understand.

Keep up the good work, and may I say that after five years of playing D&D, and occasionally buying the few good issues of *Dragon* over the past several years, that I have subscribed. Thank you for finally putting out a magazine we can all be proud of. Your quality of content has improved greatly, and your new features are well worth the money.

Justin Carmical • Tallahassee, FL

As you can see, Pete and Ole continue to blend both the "challenging" typefaces and the traditional ones in an effort to keep the magazine fresh but readable in our continuing mission to please all of the people all of the time. The moment we move to television, however, they're right out.

Posters? Maps!

I'd like to begin by saying that I have only recently subscribed to *Dragon*, but I have already found the content to be worth the purchase. Most of the articles are fabulously done, the monsters are well thought out, and the comics are a great addition.

I noticed that almost every issue of *Dragon* comes with some sort of a poster inside. These posters range from maps of castles to boardgames and are always pretty cool. However, I was wondering if it would be possible to print out some posters of varying landscapes. A lot of gamers use plexiglass sheets for their miniatures, and if *Dragon* sent out maps of landscapes to slide under the plexiglass, well, if I wasn't already a subscriber, I would immediately become one just to get those posters. I cannot even begin to convey how helpful they would be to session preparation.

Adam Quinn • Champlin, MN

Your landscapes idea is a good one—perhaps it's something we can do instead of a future installment of the Instant Dungeon Tiles maps. We'll put it in the "future projects" file and dig it out next time we're scheduling onserts. In the meantime, we welcome any and all suggestions for nifty stuff to put in the polybag.

Fruitcake

A couple requests and comments:

Why don't you do an article of all the characters that are mentioned throughout the *Players Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide*? I think we all would like to see the stats of Mialee and Lidda. It would be nice to see how they progressed as well, if the players can remember. (I am assuming that these were characters of some of the playtesters.)

It would be nice if you made that really cool font in your magazine title available, as well as some of the other typeface that was used in the creation of the magazine and the products (links to where we can get them would be as good.) I have the Forgotten Realms font from the *Forgotten Realms Atlas* done with *CC2* by Profantasy, and even though I do not play in Faerûn I make use of the font.

I do like the new magazine format. However, I agree with several of the people that the first issue looked like a bad Web page where someone tried using every graphic variation possible on one page. I chalked it up to overexcitement. I do like the idea that you are not using the magazine as one huge ad for each new product that is coming out in the same month as the magazine.

I do not like when you have two articles starting on one page, or have an article start in the middle of another article. It breaks up the flow of the magazine for me. I often do not read the articles that start in the middle of another, because I finish the first and go on to the next article. It would be nice if certain pages retained their look from issue to issue, like the table of contents does. The black text on a light page stands out much more than the white text on a dark page.

Lastly, this is to Dave Gross: It would be nice if you read the content of the magazine before writing the editorial. I really got excited when I read your editorial "Reinventing the Dwarf" (*Dragon* #278, page 8). Here was a magazine dedicated to the dwarf and you are talking about how you can set the tone for the dwarf by being the first to play the dwarf. Well the rest of the magazine was a disappointment for me, since I thought that you would make the first magazine dedicated to a race an opportunity to offer some ideas on reinventing the dwarf. All the articles dealt with dwarves the same old way. I hope you will take future opportunities to offer something new to reflect the new style of the magazine. Issue #278 reminds me of the jokes about a fruitcake that is passed from family member to family member each holiday season and the only change to it is the gift wrap. Your December issue of *Dragon* was a fruitcake in that sense.

John Csaky • (address withheld)

What's not to like about fruitcake?

Seriously, reinvention makes sense only if there's a tradition from which to break, so much of the December issue's content remained true to existing perceptions of dwarves. Still, you make a good point, and we'll look for more chances to break with tradition in future dwarf articles.

The magazine's logo isn't actually a typeface, though perhaps one day we'll turn it into one. When we do, we'll find a way to share it with Dragon Magazine *readers.*

Look for the iconic characters to appear later this year in Enemies and Allies, *a collection of characters to use as NPCs or ready-to-play PCs.*

Dwarves? Dwarves!

I have been playing D&D for about fifteen years, and I have never played a dwarf. Dwarves have always been sketchy at best, often the unseen suppliers of weapons and armor and fronted by a human (or elven) shop clerk. I guess I just couldn't get into their heads to roleplay them comfortably enough to make them anything other than short, stocky humans with beards and attitudes. Thanks to issue #278, I have enough background, culture, and psychology to bring dwarves to life.

I see that an upcoming issue will focus on elves. I can only hope that the other nonhuman races will be treated with as much in-depth coverage. Speaking of elves, why not give the drow their own issue, rather than lumping them with the surface elves? Their culture is so completely different from the surface elves that they should not be treated as the same race. You know they deserve better.

Elzbeth Maclain • Big Rapids, MI

We hope last issue's elven extravaganza soothed your elf craving. Even though last month's cover and main feature were drow-heavy, we are still batting around the idea of an all-drow issue. Who'll be the first to second Elzbeth's request?

Bad—No, Good!

Since issue #274 I've been worried about the direction *DRAGON* has been taking. The new, punkish look almost actively dispels the medieval atmosphere (or gothic, for RAVENLOFT fans) that I find essential for the game. The artwork is too preoccupied with the nitty-gritty details of the characters, monsters, weapons, and so on. While an image of, say, a half-orc paladin (something I never thought I'd live to see) is interesting, it doesn't evoke anything timeless nor stir my imagination. I suppose I sound like a Neo-classicist.

That said, I'm actually writing to compliment your magazine. For the last half-year, the articles have been getting better and better. The Sherwood campaign has been adopted almost wholesale into my campaign world (developing one of the vast forests in the world that lacked everything but a cool name, and no one had any reason to explore). I particularly enjoyed reading the histories of the varied swords in issue #277. Also, I applaud all of the advice columns like "Dungeoncraft." Though not always applicable every time, they provide wonderful seeds for future adventures and entire story arcs, as well as being written in a conversational, fun-to-read style. I read *DRAGON* to gain new rules, insights, monsters, and so on on the game, but also as a magazine for entertainment.

Tom Creeley • Hudson, ME

Realms Gods?

I've been a fan of your magazine for a good ten years now. For about two of those ten years I've been the DM of an ongoing FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign. The players and I have been going in our own direction, following our own quests, as Faerûn revolved around us (so to speak). We were more or less oblivious to the official events unfolding around us. We felt bad that we, as residents of Faerûn, were not more in tune with the world around us. The purpose of this letter I suppose, is a plea. I hope you'll continue to give coverage of the FORGOTTEN REALMS in the form of Volo's writings, the countdown to the new FORGOTTEN REALMS book, and any additional information that becomes available. The release of the new core books has re-energized me as a DM. I look forward to the new FORGOTTEN REALMS book with greater anticipation. At the same time, I hope the old feeling remains—the awe and wonder that is the FORGOTTEN REALMS.

Any chance of remaking any of the previous articles about the FORGOTTEN REALMS for the new edition (such as the lesser Seldarine Gods)? How about my favorite non-human race from Toril, the saurials?

Dean Siemsen • Northumberland, PA

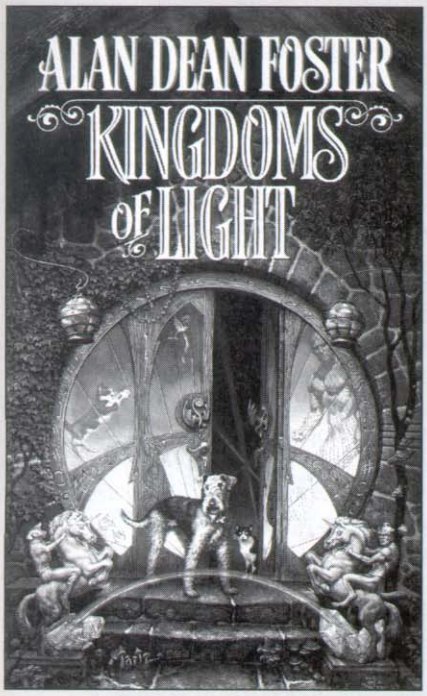
While we don't plan wholesale adaptations of earlier articles to the new edition, our FORGOTTEN REALMS coverage will get a big boost in June, with the release of the new campaign book. Watch for a transformation in Ed Greenwood's Volo articles, as well as the addition of a new series.

Game Night

by George William Herbert

GM Roll your final election night success rolls.
GWB (Rolls) Eleven! Marginal success.
AG (Rolls) Eleven! Also marginal success.
GM Ok. Let's see how bad this is. (Rolls an 18.) Well, isn't that special. Critical chaos table . . . GWB, isn't your brother in charge of Florida?
GWB Yeah, but he's an NPC.
GM Too bad. AG, Florida was called for you on election night, but has shifted back to GWB by . . . (rolls) . . . twelve hundred votes. Al has a . . . (rolls) . . . 0.2% lead in the popular vote but is losing the electoral college if Florida stays in GWB's column.
AG Recount! Recount!
GWB No fair, if I'm winning . . .
GM Marginal success.
GWB But that was a success!
GM (Rolls) Eighteen again! An excellent success. The election authorities in one of the Florida counties screwed up the ballot so all the voters with IQ under 100 or over 75 years old voted for the wrong person or twice.
GWB Aaaaaaah!
AG I sue! No, wait, I don't sue. The voters sue . . .
GM Roll to convince some voters to sue.
AG (Rolls) Fourteen! I got 'em!
GWB This is just terrible. We can't be doing this to the country. Concede already, Al.
AG Did the media see that? Did they?
GM GWB, make a saving throw vs. media.
GWB (Rolls) Eight. Nope.
GM Make a saving throw vs. public opinion.
GWB (Rolls) Twelve. Close enough?
GM People are shaking their heads, but they aren't trying to burn down your house.
GWB Whew!
GM (Rolls) Seventeen. Excellent. The first recount results show GWB's lead narrowing to . . . (rolls) . . . 350 votes!
AG I want a hand recount.
GWB No, you don't.
AG It says I can have a hand recount. It's on page 41 of the Election Master's Guide, third paragraph, second sentence.
GWB Don't be a wussy Rules Lawyer.
GM (Flips pages) He's right.
GWB Well, damnit. I'm suing to stop him anyway.
GM You're suing to overturn the rules?
GWB Damn straight.
GM Okay . . . roll for it.
GWB (Rolls) Fifteen! Hey, look at that! I got a 15!
GM Good, but not good enough to overturn a game rule . . .
AG Haw haw.
GWB See if I share my pizza with you next time.
AG There's no need to get snippy.

NEW FROM ASPECT



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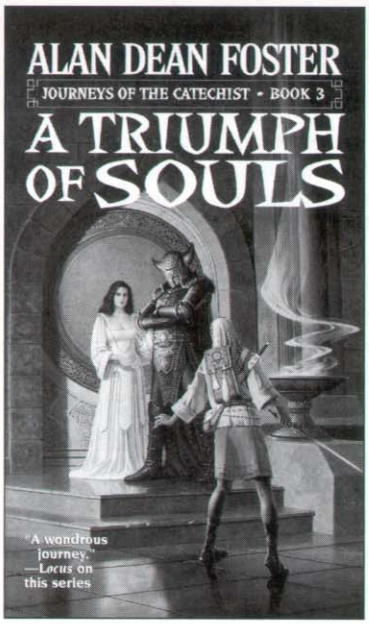

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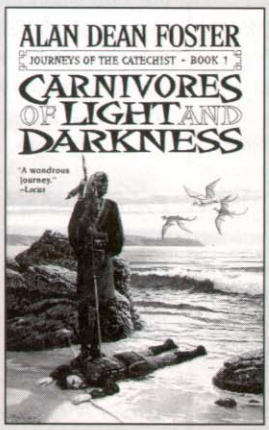

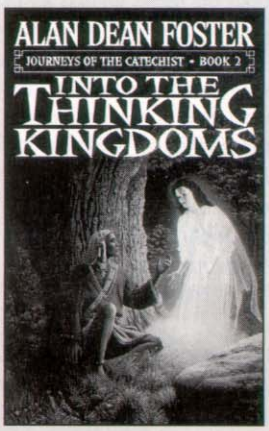

"Top-drawer Foster, featuring a fast-paced mix of wry humor, high fantasy and amazing new places and creatures." —*Publishers Weekly*

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Wither the Bladesinger?

My roleplaying group and I are seriously enjoying the new edition and every new issue of *Dragon* that comes out. I enjoy the "Class Acts" section. This is the greatest. I especially liked the "Hunter of the Dead." We used this class as a template for a demon hunter prestige class. Now to my request . . .

For three years now I have been running a campaign for a group of college friends in Columbia, Missouri. I have been playing D&D since I was thirteen; I am now twenty-one. Ever since I got into this game, I have loved the elf. My first handbook was the *Complete Elves Handbook,* and I absolutely fell in love with the bladesinger kit. I was hoping to see it and the dwarven battlerager in the *Dungeon Master's Guide,* but alas it was not so. I also don't believe that I could do these justice as prestige classes. That's where you come in. You guys have done some excellent prestige classes so far, and I was wondering if you could add the bladesinger to your list for the "Class Acts" section. However, if this is going to be released in a future game supplement, then just let me know which one so I can get it.

Matthew Boley • Columbia, MO

A balanced version of the infamous bladesinger was high on our list of candidates for a "Class Acts" treatment, but the R&D staff beat us to the punch. They're working on just such a prestige class for the upcoming Tome and Blood *sourcebook, due for release this summer.*

Spoilers

I am a recent re-subscriber to *Dragon Magazine* (my first subscription was in the Lake Geneva days). In general I think that your staff is doing a great job with the magazine. I do have a complaint, however.

The last two issues I've seen have had *Nodwick* cartoons that provide inside information on modules that you have just published: *The Sunless Citadel* and *Forge of Fury.* I suppose I wouldn't mind except that I play with a DM that is running these adventures. When I saw the *Sunless Citadel* strip, we had already played through a great deal of it, so not much was spoiled. The *Forge of Fury* strip I have not read, because I don't want to ruin my experience of bashing that particular dungeon.

I really enjoy *Nodwick,* and I think it's a great addition to your magazine, but I question the wisdom of using it to expose plotlines for modules that someone might want to run some day. Surely the author can come up with something original.

Michael Wisler • Belmont, CA

Even though we played the adventures before sending them to Aaron for inspiration, and the results didn't strike us as spoilers, your letter and a few others like it have changed our minds. We'll be much more careful to avoid spoilage when lampooning contemporary adventures.

Father Knows Best . . . Eventually

My son and I picked up a copy of the new D&D game a couple of weeks ago, and I have to tell you that we are sorry we have never played D&D before.

I have played historical war games since the '70s. Then D&D came along, and a lot of club members "went over," much to my disgust. For the last three years, my son (who is ten years old and already an experienced gamer) and I have played Warhammer 40K and all of the other Games Workshop spinoffs—until now.

The thing that really brought us over was the "Learn to Play" section on the Wizards of the Coast website. We realized that D&D was nowhere near as strange or complex as we had thought, so we said "we'll have some of that!" Now we have some very nice miniatures from your online store (which gave us incredibly quick service), and the three Core Rulebooks will be under the Christmas tree.

That brings me to *Dragon Magazine.* As we went full throttle into the game, we had to gather as much knowledge as we could, and your mag was recommended to me as the "holy tome" for new and veteran players. Issue #277 was the one that we picked up. Brilliant! "How You Play The Game" by Tracy Raye Hickman was outstanding, especially for a couple of novices like us.

I could write all night, but I have to stop now—my son wants to get into more "damp dungeons and stuff!" Keep up the great work.

Paul Taylor
Victoria • British Columbia
Canada

P.S. My son just picked up two issues of *Nodwick.* I guess we are in it for the long haul!

At conventions and other trips, we've run into quite a few people who say they've taught their kids to play D&D or vice versa. We'd love to hear more stories like theirs.

AN UNCOMMON APOLOGY TO OUR READERS

Every day around 10 A.M. a truck pulls up and dumps out a few sacks of mail. By 11:30 one of our several halfling interns (please don't call them oompah-loompahs) have categorized the letters by theme. About ten letters concern new edition rules. Maybe fifteen or twenty helpfully point out mistakes and typos in the magazine. Perhaps thirty or so letters point out mistakes in other peoples' letters. The remaining several thousand letters are vicious criticisms concerning the lack of chainmail bikinis.

As the person primarily responsible for this lack of **revealing attire**. *I have only one thing to say: I'm sorry.*

As an act of good faith we start this issue with Rebecca Guay's **semi-dressed conjurist**. *In the article dealing with your sorcerer's origins you'll find an excellent* **new edition bikini top** *that happens to be filled with, umm . . . flesh. For those who are more interested in men, (not that there's anything wrong with that) you will encounter a masculine* **topless dwarf** *in the article entitled "Magic In the Blood." A* **low-cut top** *can be found at the beginning of "Just the Facts, Mage." Finally, we have another treat for admirers of the male figure in the masterful fiction illustration that features an* **up-kilt shot** *of Fool Wolf. As an added bonus, I'm wearing a burlap codpiece.* **The pendulum of good taste is taking a big swing the other way.**

This is just the beginning. Wait until you see the cover of issue #282!

Peter Whitley, Art Director

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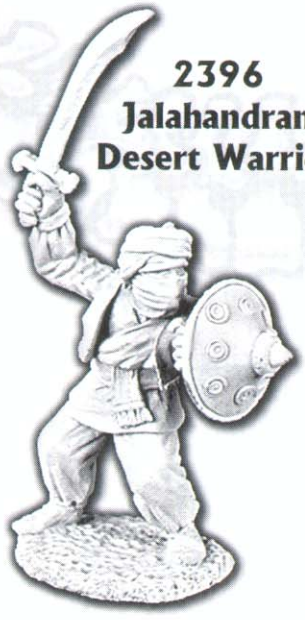
2410
Sir Guy
The Red Knight



2396
Jalahandran
Desert Warrior

2411
Sister Catherine
Battle Nun

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(Designed by Phillip Roop)
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FOR ART'S SAKE

by Michael G. Ryan

If you don't know Aaron Williams, you don't know *Nodwick* . . . or something along those lines. (It's hard to compete with the punny titles of his comic strip, like "Furious Forge," "Sink Different," and "Lolth in Space.") If you do know Aaron, you're probably familiar with his impressive and popular *Dragon* strip, *Nodwick,* an armed-and-armored *Peanuts* for the D&D crowd. "I'm still in awe about how well *Nodwick* has done," Aaron says of his famed henchman and archetype companions, who sprang to life shortly after "series comics" ended in *Dragon Magazine.* When Aaron was asked to create a new, shorter strip, he looked to *Dilbert,* his favorite comic strip for inspiration. "I guess one could make the case that the henchman is the trodden-on office worker of his era," he explains. He then created a quartet of adventurers that have become staples of *Dragon's* humor.

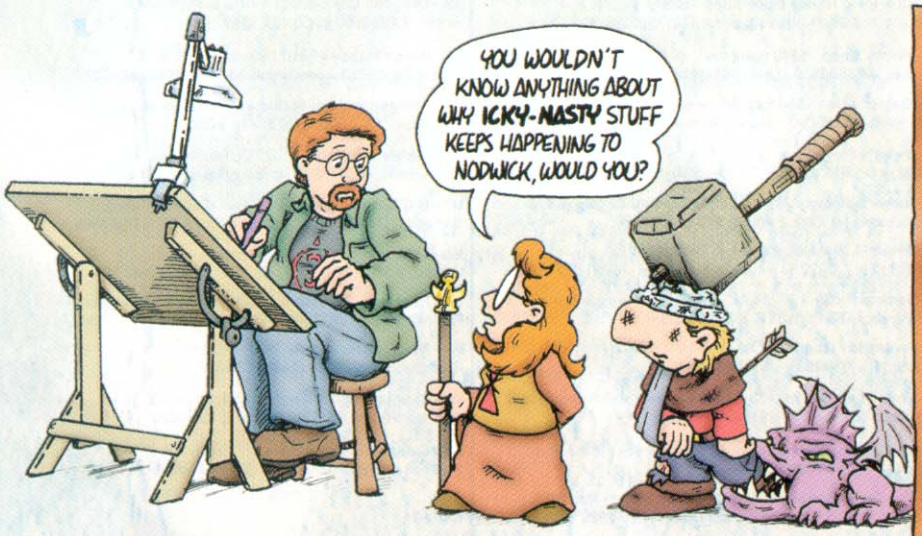
"Nodwick has already evolved (nose growth, especially) into the brains of the outfit," Aaron says of his hero's evolution. "Piffany's personality has pretty much remained as I crafted it, but her glasses have grown considerably (widening due to the antics of her co-adventurers, no doubt). Artax and Yeagar are due for a little character development, which should happen later this year in a larger story I've got planned . . ."

Comic Timing

At thirty, Aaron's been gaming for twenty years now, beginning way back with the first D&D set ("the one with the blue rulebook"). Although he minored in art at William Woods University (and came away with a BS in political science from Westminster College), he traces his interest in comics back well before college days. "I drew a lot of weird stuff while watching Saturday morning cartoons when I was a kid," he remembers. "I first got interested in comics when I discovered some hardback *Peanuts* books that my folks had in the house. I was hooked, and I've been doodling ever since."

His relationship with *Dragon Magazine* began "somewhere around issue #65. I saw they had cartoons, and I sent in several before the 'no SASE ogre' was warning people about submissions. I figure that my first batches of 'toons are buried somewhere in Wisconsin. After then-art director Lori Svickel published my first cartoon, I continued to send stuff to *Dragon,* where they would occasionally print some of my drawings to shut me up."

Floyd was Aaron's "breakthrough" strip, headed by a character that Aaron describes as "resembling me in my earlier days—before women started suggesting I use a comb, but without my svelte 'body by Willy Wonka and Coca-Cola' look." *Floyd*—inspired by Phil Foglio and Robert Asprin's *Myth Adventures* comics and named after a family friend—first came to life when Aaron was about thirteen. *Floyd* was reinvented many times by Aaron before finally finding a home in *Dragon,* but



Inspiration?
I find many comic books inspirational, especially for storytelling. My favorites have been *The Sandman, Watchmen, Astro City,* and *Rising Stars,* to name a few. If nothing else, they help me to see what can happen if you can make a good, tight story.

Where does Aaron Williams look for the stuff that comics are made of?
Family . . . Circus . . . brings . . . pain!
—Aaron Williams

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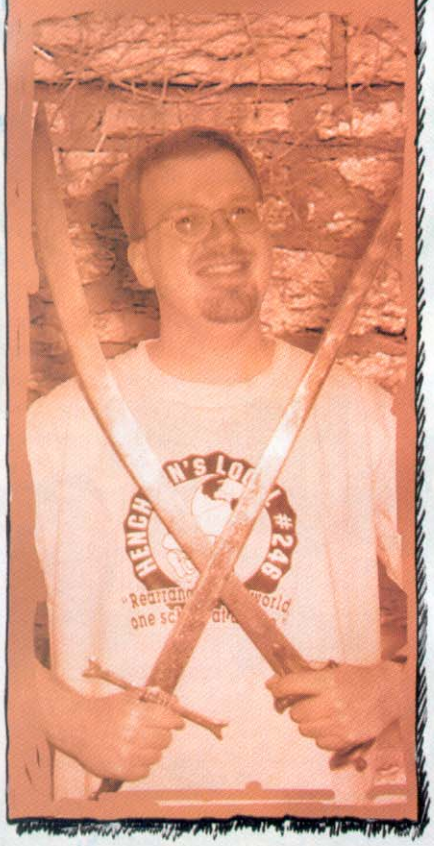
Have you ever drawn a strip that you really liked, only to sit back and realize, "I don't think I can publish that"?

"I've come up with a few ideas that never made it to paper because I knew the standards at Wizards of the Coast hadn't fallen far enough. One involves a bunch of adventurers under a tree. Some kind of 'rain' is falling on them. One adventurer says: 'Man, I could swear it's only raining over this tree.' On either side of the tree is a giant foot . . ."



Floyd's days were numbered as the composition for comics in the magazine changed. Although *Floyd* is gone, he's certainly not forgotten. "Right now, I really want to continue the story I started," Aaron says. "Most likely as a three-page supplement to my comic book. I'm trying out a thirty-page story in *Nodwick,* so we'll see if I can handle more art in my schedule."

A Wink and a Nod

In August of 1999, Aaron teamed up with John Kovalic (creator of the *Dork Tower* comic book and another comic artist familiar to *DRAGON* readers) to create Dork Storm Press, the publisher for *Dork Tower, Nodwick,* and, beginning next spring, Scott Kurtz's *PvP,* as well as a variety of other related products. (You can see all of the Dork Storm Press releases at their website: **http://kovalic.com/dorkstorm/index.html.**) *Nodwick,* already popular in *DRAGON,* now reaches more than six thousand additional monthly readers. Of course, this raises the bar for Aaron's ability to write and draw his strip.

"I guess what tests me the most is when I need to squeeze a lot of dialogue into one panel," he says. "Y'see, I ink the text first, and then I draw the panel around said text. I really have to play with camera angles sometimes to get everyone in the frame. You're made painfully aware of how tall Artax is compared to Piffany at times like this . . ."

His accelerated work schedule notwithstanding, Aaron still has some of his best work on the horizon. While he cites one of his most memorable pieces as being behind him ("A castle under siege, and the inhabitants are hanging a banner on the wall that reads 'Up Thine!' It's memorable because when I thought of the idea, I almost wrecked my car trying to write it down at 70 miles per hour, and it led to an ill-conceived run of t-shirts displaying 'Up Thine!' in a scripty font, most of which are in my office closet"), his favorite panels from his comic book haven't even been published yet. "I have a page where Nodwick dies about nine times!" he says enthusiastically. "A record! It'll be in issue #6."

But it's clear that the pressure really doesn't bother Aaron all that much. He's very happy doing what he's doing. "My favorite thing about *Nodwick* is just being able to tell fun stories. I can send-up those epic fantasy tales we all read while making my own little story of heroism come through. Did I mention that Nodwick and company will save the world in coming issues?"

Even more important to Aaron than enjoying what he does is the support he's had from everyone around him. "My friends think it's awesome that I do this for a living," he says. "One of them even berates me to draw faster, especially when he's read pages 1-12 and hears that there are ten more pages yet to be penciled. My parents have always supported my art habit, which goes against every ABC after-school special I've seen. I couldn't have done it without all the encouragement I've received from those around me. I hope to have a more complete list of thank-yous in my *Nodwick* trade paperback, but until then: Thanks to everyone!" D

Portrait of the Artist . . . as an Artist

Aaron Williams leads a life that most of us can only dream about—and to hear Aaron describe it, that's the safest way to experience said life. So what actually happens during a day in the life of an artist? While Van Gogh always pretended he didn't hear the question, Aaron is glad to provide a peek into the unique and glorious lifestyle of someone who makes a living constantly going back to the drawing board . . .

- Get up. Stub toe. Curse at self for leaving chair out in the middle of the room.
- Shower. Remember that I forgot to buy shampoo. Use liquid soap instead.
- Eat cereal. Discover that the milk expired a week ago.
- Go to drawing table and draw stuff (this covers a host of sins, from the *Nodwick* comic to *DRAGON* strips and toons, game illustrations, and so on).
- Eat lunch, which consists of stuff not moving in fridge.
- Draw more while listening to NPR's "Talk of the Nation." Notice that the sun has set. Shrug and draw some more, stopping to make something for dinner. Hopefully there will be enough to use as breakfast for a while.
- Fend off milk's advances as it hurls condiments from fridge . . . and so on.

Each day is different. Some days I trek to the post office to mail off t-shirts and pay bills, while on other days I try to install a new piece of hardware in my computer (which downs the machine for a week). I must say, though, it beats working in a cubicle!

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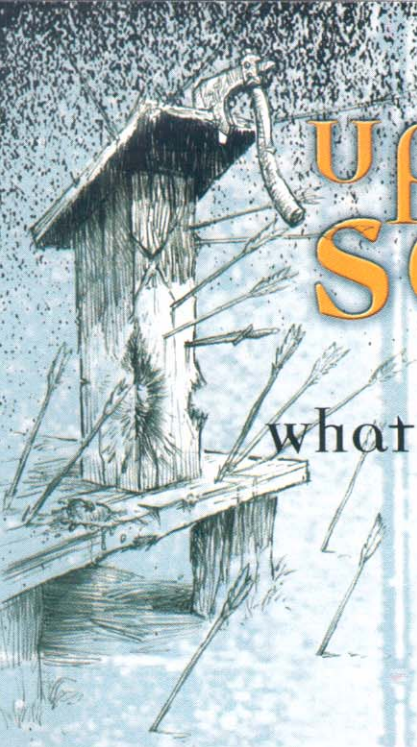


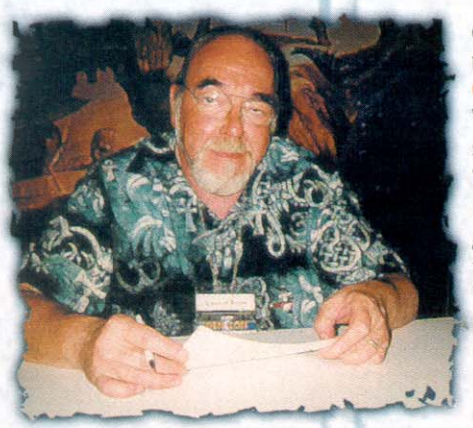
Up on a Soapbox

by Gary Gygax

What the Heck is a Roleplaying Game?! Part 2

Last column you had the chance to see the sixteen various factors that are component parts of the roleplaying game form.

Before going further, please note that when "lesser" or "greater" is used below in regard to player ranking, all of the elements given are vital to a complete and compelling RPG design. Some elements might have more or less importance in a particular game but all the elements are there. That is one of the great things about the RPG. Each group can tailor the underlying system to suit its idea of what is "best" in play. In all, a game or campaign that promotes the "lesser" elements of the RPG over those that rank higher, is completely valid. It is likely that the exercise will have fewer participants, but there is no question as to the validity of the game as played—assuming that the choice is voluntary, not made perforce because of game content or dictate of the Dungeon Master.



Now, let's examine each element one at a time:

Building

To the D&D game player this should be a given. From the very beginning of the game, the rules suggested that construction of a stronghold was one of the goals for a successful PC. While it is by no means mandatory, the acquisition of land and the building of a castle is an option to consider. In some campaigns the option might be virtually unused; in others it could be an important achievement. This is also true of other RPG genres. In all cases the building element is valid. As of this writing, the rating for this factor is about 4 on a scale of 0 to 9.

Business

This was a factor I overlooked in my initial construction of the list of elements belonging to the RPG. While creating and running a business is not likely to be a main feature of a fantasy game campaign, it is near critical in others. Those readers familiar with *Boot Hill* will recall how large a part business played in that game. This factor can serve as an income producer for the character or PC group, a cover, a means of entrance into adventures, and so on. Thus it was included as a principle element of the game form. Current rating places it at about 4.

Character Development

What needs to be said about the inclusion of this element? While in a straight "hack-and-slash" game it has small importance, in most campaigns this is a given. The game persona needs a history to bring verisimilitude to play. Then events in the game add new information to the continuing saga of the PC's life. In all genres of RPGs this is a key factor. Its current rating of just over 7 supports this conclusion.

Combat

Here we have a "hot or cold" dichotomy. Many respondents give combat a top rating of 9, while some rate it lower or very low. I happen to believe it is a critical part of an RPG. As in any dramatic presentation, the confrontation and resolution by deadly means is a culminating factor. It combines the sense of danger and threat of extinction with the physical capacity to overcome the danger and obviate the threat. In all dramatic stories featuring action, there is combat. Again, this has so far proven to be the case with those ranking the elements of the RPG. Despite some who rate it low, Combat has a current rating of over 7, placing it into the "key factors" group.

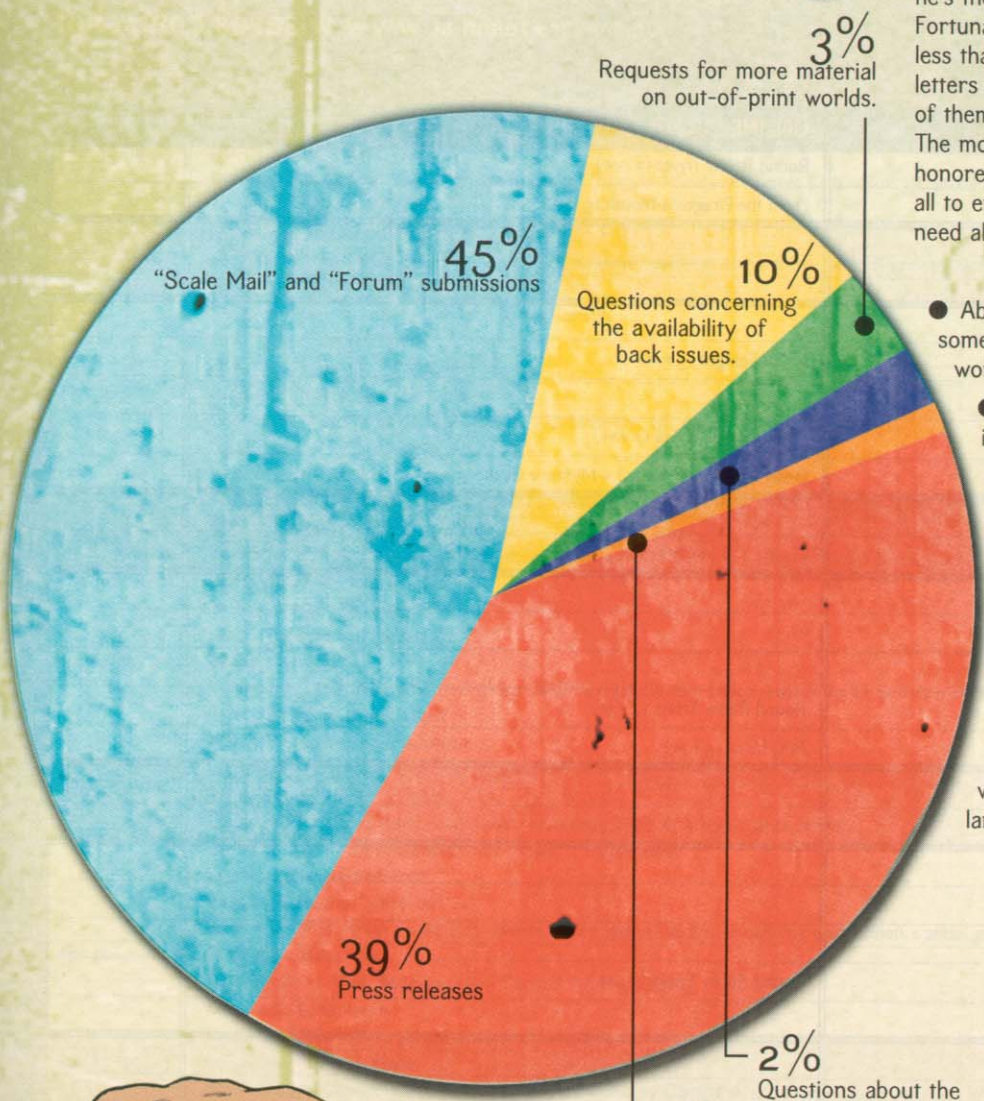
Next month we will cover as many of the remaining elements as space permits, setting forth the reasoning behind why each was included, noting their current rankings too. D

As a reminder, here are the sixteen parts suggested as forming the greater whole:

1. Building *construction, land acquisition, and so on*
2. Business *an occupation aside from adventuring*
3. Character development *detailing a character's history*
4. Combat
5. Economics
6. Exploration *dungeons and for larger discovery*
7. Intrigue
8. Politics
9. Problem solving
10. Questing
11. Random chance *encounters, resolution of combat, and so on*
12. Role assumption *staying "in character" in actions/thinking*
13. Roleplaying *ditto, and speaking thus when playing*
14. Story *backstory and in play*
15. Strategy
16. Theatrics *occasional histrionics and sound effects*

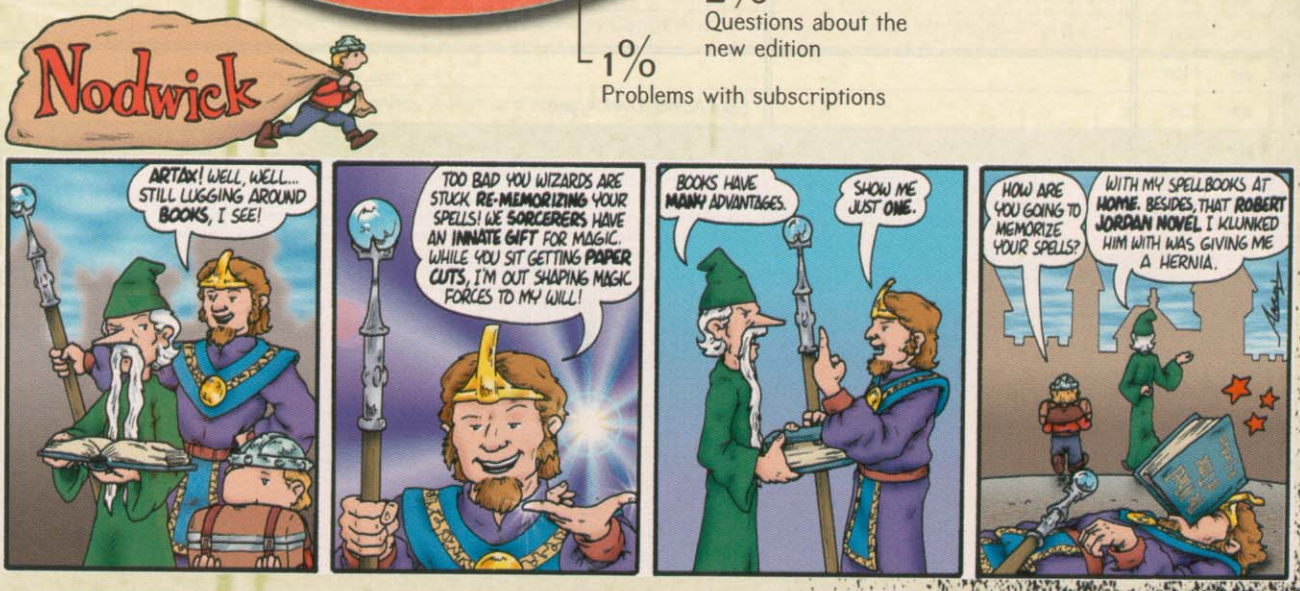
THE MAILBAG

Each month *Dragon Magazine* receives an average of 800 emails.



Not counting the message boards, we receive about 800 letters each month. Check out the pie chart for the breakdown. Eric Haddock, assistant editor at *Dragon Magazine*, reads all the email that comes into the **scalemail@wizards.com**, and **forum@wizards.com** accounts, so he's the keeper of the "Freak File." Fortunately, these scary letters comprise less than half of one percent of all letters to the *Dragon* offices, and some of them are more funny than frightening. The most astonishing make it to the honored spot outside Eric's cube for all to enjoy. (Hey, magazine editors need all the laughs they can get.)

- About **one email a day** is from someone who can barely put two words together.
- About **one email a week** is in all caps.
- About **one email a month** is about something that really makes no sense at all . . .
- About **every other month**, we receive a letter that begins, "Pardon my poor english, but . . . ." These are always more coherent than those in item #1.
- **Once or twice a year**, we receive a letter in a language other than english.


Nodwick
ARTAX! WELL, WELL... STILL LUGGING AROUND BOOKS, I SEE!
TOO BAD YOU WIZARDS ARE STUCK RE-MEMORIZING YOUR SPELLS! WE SORCERERS HAVE AN INNATE GIFT FOR MAGIC. WHILE YOU SIT GETTING PAPER CUTS, I'M OUT SHAPING MAGIC FORCES TO MY WILL!
BOOKS HAVE MANY ADVANTAGES.
SHOW ME JUST ONE.
HOW ARE YOU GOING TO MEMORIZE YOUR SPELLS?
WITH MY SPELLBOOKS AT HOME. BESIDES, THAT ROBERT JORDAN NOVEL I KLUNKED HIM WITH WAS GIVING ME A HERNIA.

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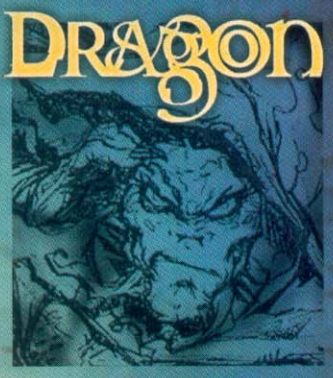
DAY		CONVENTIONS	ONLINE EVENT
1	Thu		Round Robin Trivia (7 P.M.)
2	Fri		From the Dragon's Mouth (5 P.M.)
3	Sat		
4	Sun		
5	Mon		
6	Tue		RPGA Tonight (5 P.M.)
7	Wed		
8	Thu		Round Robin Trivia (7 P.M.)
9	Fri		Designer's Guild (5 P.M.) • Mystery Guest (5 P.M.)
10	Sat		
11	Sun		
12	Mon		
13	Tue		
14	Wed		
15	Thu		Round Robin Trivia (7 P.M.)
16	Fri		RPG Hour (5 P.M.)
17	Sat		
18	Sun		
19	Mon		
20	Tue		
21	Wed		
22	Thu		Round Robin Trivia (7 P.M.)
23	Fri		
24	Sat	GAME INVASION	
25	Sun	GAME INVASION	
26	Mon		
27	Tue		Sage Advice Live! (5 pm)
28	Wed		

CONVENTION CALENDAR POLICIES This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed. To ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct. The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order: 1. Convention title and dates held. 2. Site and location. 3. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained. Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. **Warning:** We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility. Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," DRAGON Magazine, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A. If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at (425) 204-8206 (U.S.A.). **Important:** *DRAGON Magazine* does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct. To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

DAY	FEBRUARY CONVENTIONS
Feb 24–25	**GAME INVASION** Florida University Center, University of North Florida, Jacksonville Email: info@gameinvasion.net Web: www.gameinvasion.net

DAY	UPCOMING CONVENTIONS
Mar 9–11	**COSCON** Pennsylvania Days Inn Conference Center, Butler • Contact: Circle of Swords • P.O. Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003 Featuring: RPGs, CCGs, board games, and LARPs.
Mar 16–19	**COASTCON XXIV** Mississippi Mississippi Coast Convention Center, Biloxi Email: coastcon@coastcon.org Web: www.coastcon.org Featuring: RPGs, CCGs, door prizes, miniature painting competition.
Mar 16–18	**CON°FUSION** Alberta, Canada University of Alberta, Student Union Building • Contact: Phantasy Gamers Club • Box 37, Student Union Building, U of A Edmonton, Alberta T6G2J7 Email: uapgc@ualbert.ca Featuring: RPGs, CCGs, board games, LARPs, miniature painting competition, dealers, and an auction.
Mar 16–18	**GAMES UNIVERSITY** California Radisson Hotel, Fullerton • Contact: Norm Carlson Email: gamesucon@aol.com Featuring: "Meet the Personalities" Party
Mar 16–18	**STELLARCON 25** North Carolina Greensboro Hilton • Box 4, EUC, UNCG • Greensboro, NC 27412 Email: stellarcon@hotmail.com Web: come.to/stellarcon Featuring: Panel discussion, book readings, costume contest, gaming, charity auctions, book signings.
Mar 22–25	**SIMCON XXIII** New York University of Rochester • Contact: SimCon XXIII, c/o URSGA • CPU Box 277146 • Rochester, NY 14627-7146
Mar 30–31	**CONJURATION** Montreal, Canada William Shatner Building, Montreal Email: mcgillgamers@hotmail.com
Mar 31–Apr. 2	**UBCON** New York University at Buffalo, Buffalo • Contact: SARPA • 316 Student Union, University at Buffalo • Buffalo, NY 14261 Email: kriol@mad.scientist.com Web: wings.buffalo.edu/sa/sarpa Featuring: RPGs, CCGs, and board games.
Apr 13–15	**EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN** Illinois Southern Illinois University, Carbondale • Contact: SIUC Strategic Games Society Office of Student Development, Carbondale, IL 62901-4425 Email: scotmkeene@aol.com Web: www.siu.edu/~gamesoc Featuring: RPGs, RPGA Living City events, board games, miniature painting competition, special guests, and an auction.
Apr 20–22	**EERIE CON** New York Days Inn River-View, Niagara Falls • Contact: W. Paul Ganley Email: wpaulg@aol.com Featuring: RPGs and an auction.
Apr 27–29	**SPRING OFFENSIVE** Illinois Illinois Central College, East Peoria • Contact: Tri-County Gaming Association • 1293 Peoria St., Washington, Il 61571 Email: thegameroom@mwonline.net Web: www.springoffensive.com Featuring: RPGs, miniature games, dealers, and concessions on site.

DAY	ONLINE EVENTS
Every Thursday	**ROUND ROBIN TRIVIA** 7 P.M. PST Round Robin Trivia doesn't just demand your knowing the answers to tough roleplaying trivia, it demands you know the questions as well. Come ready to give as good as you get!
Feb 2	**FROM THE DRAGON'S MOUTH** 5 P.M. PST
Feb 6	**RPGA TONIGHT** 5 P.M. PST Living Force Staff will answer questions and shoot the breeze with you (but not engage in in-character chat), so come on by!
Feb 9	**DESIGNER'S GUILD** 5 P.M. PST
Feb 9	**MYSTERY GUEST** 8:55 P.M. PST *Psionics Handbook*
Feb 16	**RPG HOUR** 5 P.M. PST **Realmswatch: Gods of Faerûn**
Feb 27	**SAGE ADVICE LIVE!** 5 P.M. PST **Ask your D&D Questions!** Think you can stump the Sage?



Dragon Magazine #281
Cover by Paolo Parente

The Calm Amid the Storm
By Bruce R. Cordell
In the swirling Plane of Limbo, the githzerai monks perfect their arts. Learn the secrets of their psionic powers, and discover two new prestige classes.

Dangerous Duos
By Jesse Decker, Will Mc Dermott, & Stephen Schubert
Rebel monks from the Scarlet Brotherhood spread heretical teachings to undermine their former masters. Join or oppose them with new psionic powers, exotic weapons, and an exclusive prestige class.

Logjam Busters!
By Robin D. Laws
Does your game come to a screaming halt when players disagree? Learn the secret to jump-starting a stalled game without picking sides.

The Hounds of Ash
By J. Gregory Keyes
Fool Wolf finally discovers the true nature of the spirit residing in his "mansion of bone," but can he outwit her in time to prevent the return of the First Evil?

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Reports from the Field

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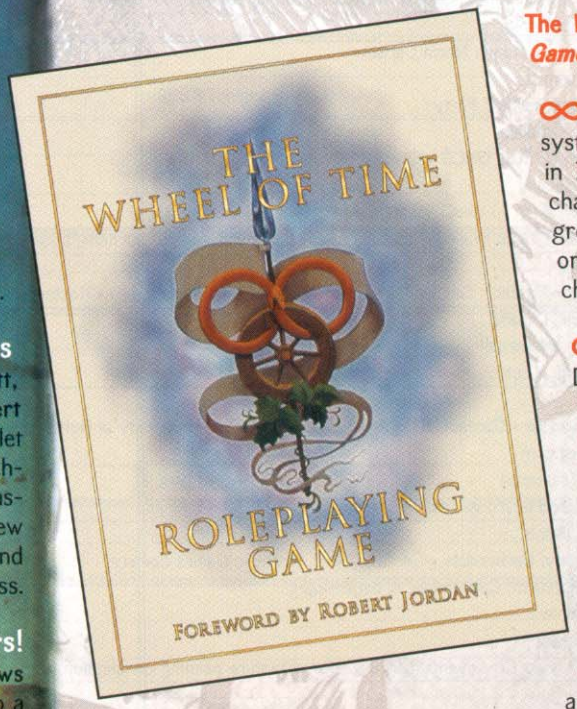

The *Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game* includes:

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- A history and geographical overview of the world of *The Wheel of Time*, covering the known world—and other mysterious realms—in detail. Explore the Aeil Waste, the Sea Folk islands, and the Blight. Travel the ways to visit Ogier steadings, take portal stones to the mirror worlds, or dream yourself into Tel'aran'rhiod.
- An introductory adventure that ties your heroes to the fate of the Dragon Reborn himself! Visit Caemlyn as the false Dragon Logain is paraded through—and find yourself enmeshed in the plots of Dark forces.

Wizards of the Coast has secured the rights to produce roleplaying games, miniatures, and other related merchandise based on Robert Jordan's bestselling *Wheel of Time* novels. Work on the roleplaying game is already underway and should be completed in time for a summer release.

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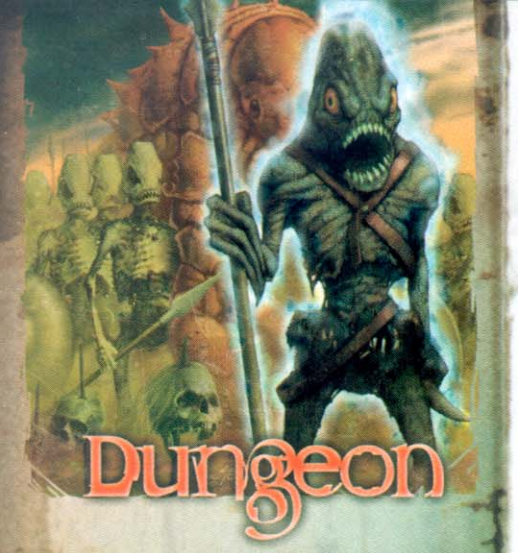

Dungeon Magazine #85
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By James Jacobs
An ancient evil has awakened to spread a plague throughout the Underdark. Can you defend the surface realm against the terrors of the Scarlet Tide?
A D&D adventure for 9th-level characters but adaptable for levels 5-15.

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Meet a pair of giants with some unusual garden statuary.
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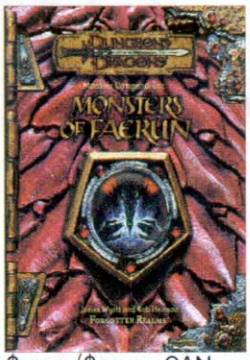

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Classic Forgotten Realms monsters like the phaerimm, curst, sharn, crawling claw, deepspawn, darkenbeast, helmed horror, and malaugrym are given new life in this full-color book.

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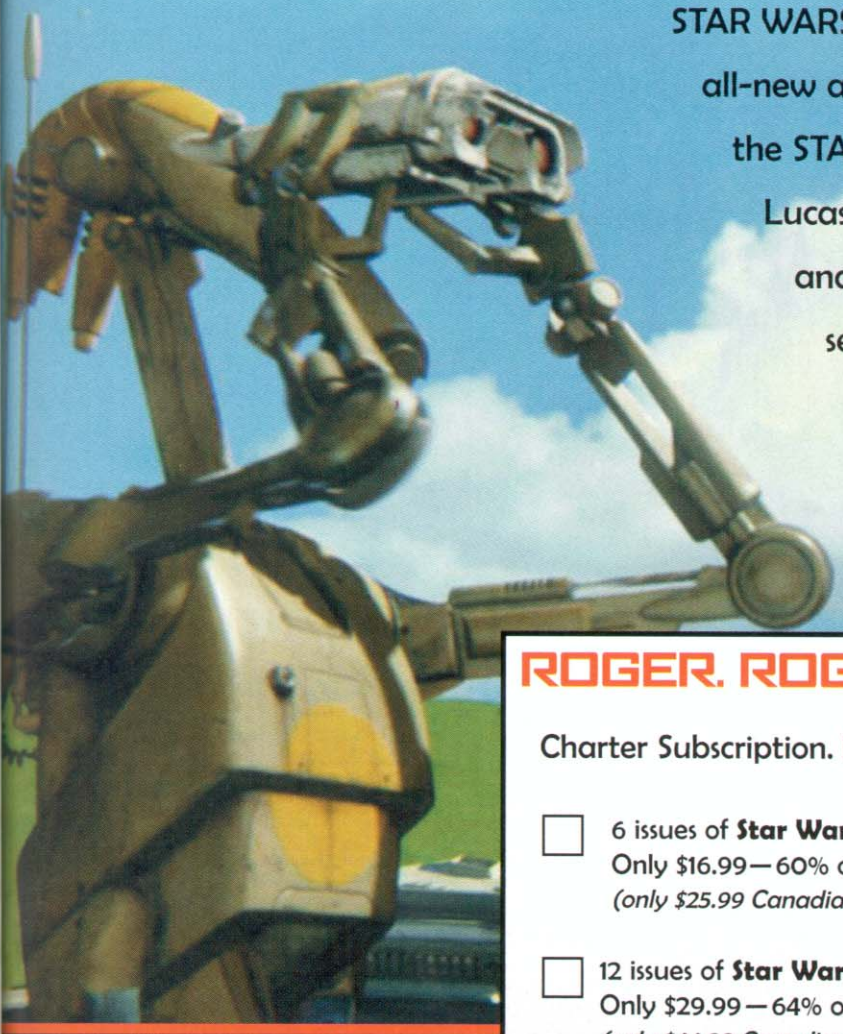

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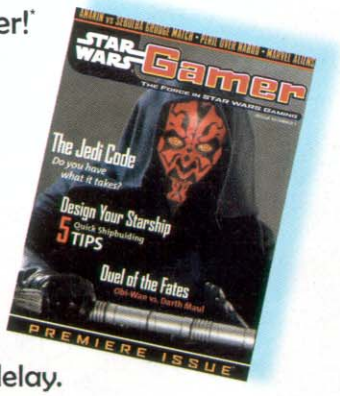

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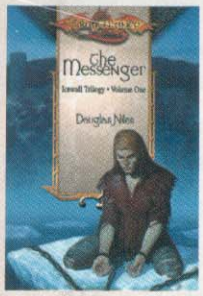

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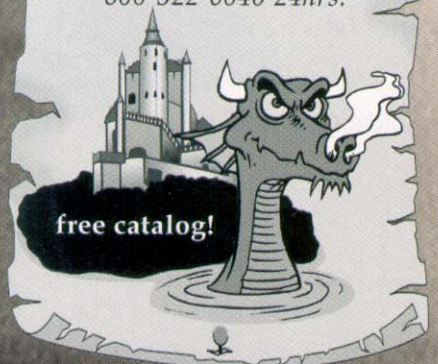

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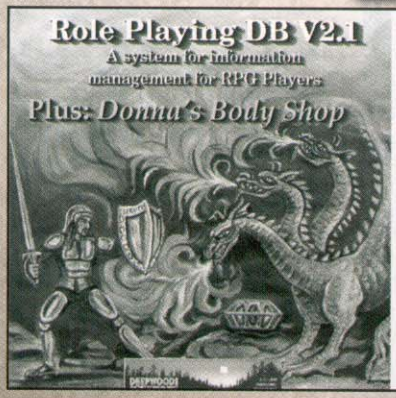

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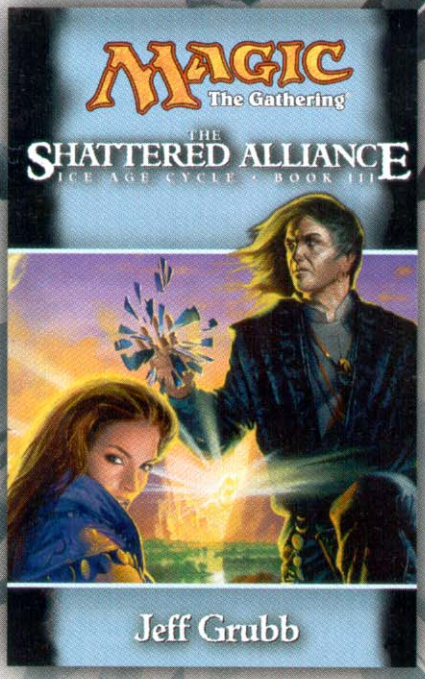

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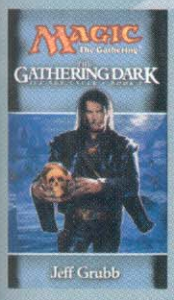

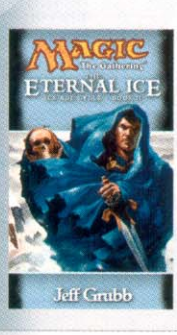

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countdown to the forgotten realms

deities & demigods

Of all the D&D campaigns ever published, the Forgotten Realms wins the prize for the most varied and detailed deities and rules for clerics. In the previous edition, the *Faiths & Avatars* and *Powers & Pantheons* books were a big hit among fans who wanted to make the most of their clerics with new spells, powers, and specialty priest options.

In addition to a detailed cosmology and descriptions of about thirty-five gods, the new setting presents rules for playing clerics of more than 100 deities of all alignments and powers. In the Deities Quick Reference, you can find each god's name, power level, favored weapon, alignment, portfolio, and—most importantly—domains.

The new setting adds thirty-three new domains to the twenty-two from the *Player's Handbook*, along with exclusive new domain spells. With its release, you can choose from the new domains: Cavern, Charm, Craft, Darkness, Drow, Dwarf, Elf, Family, Fate, Gnome, Halfling, Hatred, Illusion, Mentalism, Metal, Moon, Nobility, Ocean, Orc, Planning, Portal, Renewal, Retribution, Rune, Scalykind, Slime, Spell, Spider, Storms, Suffering, Time, Trade, and Tyranny.

What changes can you expect from the new version of the gods in the Forgotten Realms campaign? Very few, since they worked so well in the previous edition. Still, some have changed slightly over the years. Cyric, the god of murder and deceit, is "no longer barking mad," according to Creative Director Rich Baker. That doesn't mean he's any more pleasant, but he's settled down since losing some of his portfolio to Kelemvor, the Lord of the Dead.

The biggest deity development involves Iyachtu Xvim, the demigod offspring of the dead god Bane. All Rich will let us say this early is that "Xvim finally achieves his rightful place." The details are sure to give you the shivers when all is finally revealed in June.

Join us next month for a look at the secret societies of Faerûn, including the Harpers, the Zhentarim, and everything in between.

A CELESTIAL SAMPLER

To whet your appetite, here's a taste of the 100+ deities listed by name, portfolio, rank, alignment, favored weapon, and symbol—one for each alignment.

DEITIES QUICK REFERENCE

Name	Domains	Power	Alignment	Favored Weapon	Symbol	Portfolio
Auril	Air, Evil, Storm, Water	L	NE	"Icemaiden's Caress" (battleaxe)	White snowflake on gray diamond with white border	Cold, winter
Azuth	Magic, Knowledge, Law, Illusion, Spell	L	LN	"The Old Staff" (quarterstaff)	Human left hand pointing upward outlined in blue fire	Wizards, mages, spellcasters in general
Mystra	Good, Magic, Knowledge, Illusion, Rune, Spell	G	NG	Seven whirling stars (shuriken)	Circle of seven blue-white stars with red mist flowing from the center	Magic, spells, the Weave
Cyric	Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Trickery, Illusion	G	CE	"Razor's Edge" (longsword)	White jawless skull on black or purple sunburst	Murder, lies, intrigue, deception, illusion
Finder Wyvernspur	Chaos, Charm, Scalykind, Renewal	D	CN	"Sword of Songs" (bastard sword)	White harp on gray circle	Cycle of life, transformation of art, saurials
Loviatar	Suffering, Law, Evil, Strength, Fire, Retribution	L	LE	"Painbringer" (scourge)	Nine-tailed barbed scourge	Pain, hurt, agony, torment, suffering, torture
Oghma	Knowledge, Luck, Travel, Trickery, Charm	G	N	"Mortal Strike" (longsword)	Blank scroll	Knowledge, invention, inspiration, bards
Selûne	Travel, Chaos, Good, Moon, Protection	I	CG	"The Wand of Four Moons" (heavy mace)	Pair of female eyes surrounded by seven silver stars	Moon, stars, navigation, prophesy, questors, seekers, good and neutral lycanthropes
Torm	Law, Good, Healing, Protection, Strength	L	LG	"Duty's Bond" (greatsword)	Right-hand gauntlet held upright with palm forward	Duty, loyalty, obedience, paladins

THE UNPALADIN

Among the new prestige classes is one for holy warriors. Think of them as paladins without the pesky alignment restriction. Here's a sneak peek at the class:

DIVINE CHAMPION

Even the most pacifistic deities need servants who can defend their worshippers and advance their interests. Divine champions are mighty warriors who dedicate themselves to their deity's cause, defending holy ground, destroying enemies of the church, and slaying mythical beasts and clerics of opposed faiths. For deities who do not count paladins among their followers, divine champions fill the role of the church-sponsored warrior.

Most divine champions come from a combat or military background. Barbarians, fighters, monks, paladins, and rangers are the most common divine champions, but some of the more militant clerics and druids decide to become divine champions. Bards, rogues, sorcerers, and wizards rarely become divine champions unless they are particularly devout and skilled in warfare.

REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become a divine champion (DCh) of a particular deity, a character must fulfill all the following criteria:

Base Attack Bonus: +7

Feats: Weapon Focus in the deity's favored weapon.

Skills: Knowledge (religion) 3 ranks

Patron: A divine champion must have a patron deity, and it must be the deity of whom she is a champion.

Alignment: Same as deity's alignment.

CLASS SKILLS

The divine champion's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Handle Animal (Cha), Jump (Str), Knowledge (religion) (Int), Ride (Dex), Spot (Wis), and Swim (Str). See Chapter 4: Skills in the *Player's Handbook* for skill descriptions.

Skill Points at Each Level: 2 + Int modifier.

CLASS FEATURES

All the following are class features of the divine champion prestige class.

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: A divine champion is proficient with all simple and martial weapons, light armor, medium armor, and shields.

Sacred Defenses: Add this value to the divine champion's saving throws against divine spells, as well as the spell-like and supernatural abilities of outsiders.

Lay on Hands: As a defender of the faith, a divine champion may lay on hands to heal himself or another creature following the same patron as himself. The ability works like a paladin's ability to lay on hands, except the divine champion may heal 1 hit point of damage per divine champion level plus her Charisma bonus. If the divine champion is a paladin, he can combine this healing with his paladin class' lay on hands ability.

Smite Infidel: Once per day the divine champion may attempt to smite a creature with a different patron (or no patron at all) with one normal melee attack. He adds his Charisma modifier (if positive) to the attack roll and deals 1 extra point of damage per divine champion level. If the divine champion accidentally smites someone of the same patron, the smite has no effect but is still used up for that day. If the divine champion is also a paladin, he may use the smite evil ability separately or combine it with smite infidel into a single strike if the target is evil and of a different faith.

Fighter Feat: The divine champion may choose any one feat (except Weapon Specialization) from the fighter class bonus feat list on page 37 of the *Player's Handbook* or any feat with the [Fighter] designator in Chapter 4: Characters from this book.

Divine Wrath: The divine champion channels a portion of his patron's power into wrath, giving him +3 to hit, damage, and saving throws for a number of rounds equal to his Charisma modifier. During this time, the divine champion also has damage reduction 5/—. This is a supernatural ability that can be used once per day, invoked as a free action.

DIVINE CHAMPION — HIT DIE 10

Class Level	Base Attack	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Special
1st	+1	+2	+2	+0	Lay on Hands
2nd	+2	+3	+3	+0	Fighter Feat, Sacred Defenses +1
3rd	+3	+3	+3	+1	Smite Infidel
4th	+4	+4	+4	+1	Fighter Feat, Sacred Defenses +2
5th	+5	+4	+4	+1	Divine Wrath

CONVERTING THE HEATHEN

If you've already picked a god from the *Player's Handbook*, converting your cleric to the Forgotten Realms campaign is easy—just cross-reference the following chart:

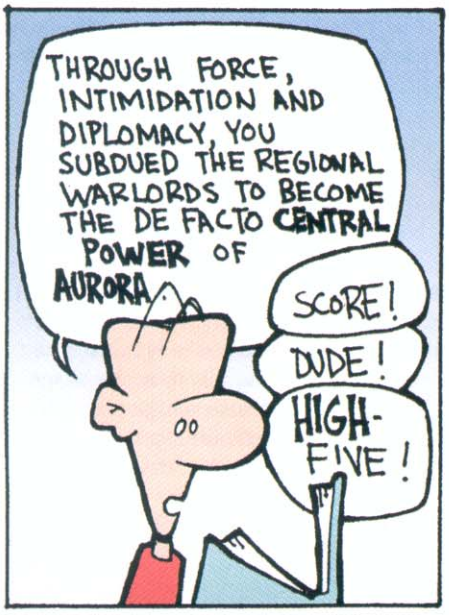
Player's Handbook Deity	Forgotten Realms Deity
Boccob	Azuth, Mystra, Savras, Velsharoon
Corellon Larethian	No change
Ehlonna	Mielikki
Erythnul	Cyric, Garagos, Malar
Fharlanghn	Selûne, Shaundakul
Garl Glittergold	No change
Gruumsh	No change
Heironeous	Torm, Tyr
Hextor	Loviatar, Xvim
Kord	Lathander, Tempus, Uthgar
Moradin	No change
Nerull	Cyric, Malar, Talona
Obad-Hai	Silvanus
Olidammara	Oghma, Sune, Tymora
Pelor	Ilmater, Lathander, Torm
St. Cuthbert	Helm, Hoar, Tyr
Vecna	Shar, Velsharoon
Wee Jas	Azuth, Kelemvor
Yondalla	No change needed

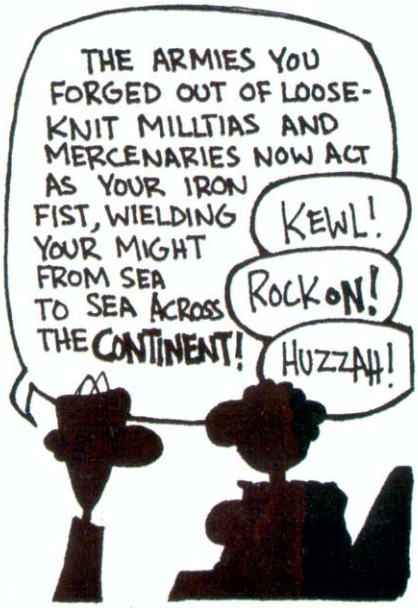
For more information on the new Forgotten Realms campaign setting, check out the Wizards of the Coast website: www.wizards.com/ForgottenRealms/Welcome.asp

DORK TOWER

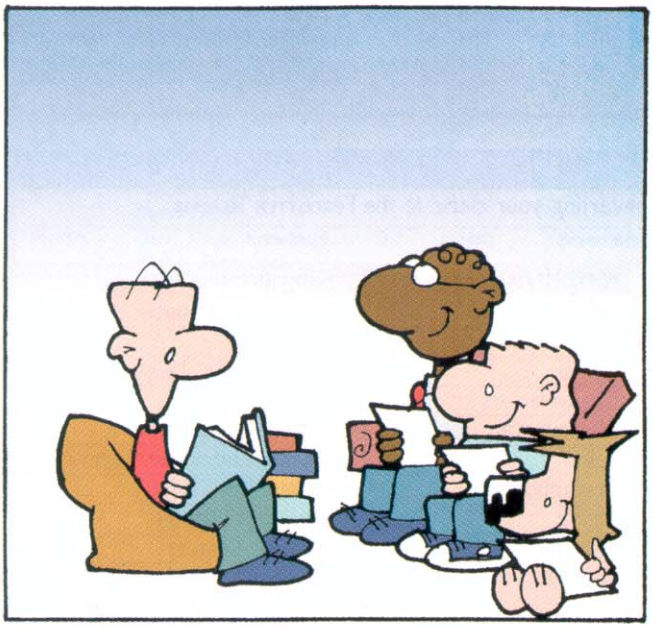
BY JOHN KOVALIC

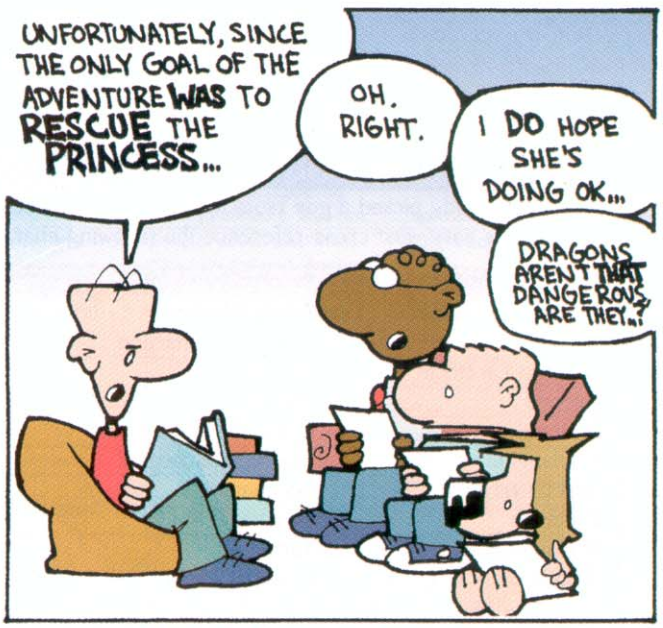
WELL, GUYS, THAT'S THE END OF THE ADVENTURE. AND IT'S AMAZING WHAT YOU ACCOMPLISHED ...
HURRAH!
HUZZAH!
HEY, NONNY-NONNY!
YOUR BANDIT FORTRESS- WHICH YOU BUILT UP FROM NOTHING- IS NOW THE MIGHTIEST STRONGPOINT IN THE LAND!
YES!
SCORE!
DUDE!


THROUGH FORCE, INTIMIDATION AND DIPLOMACY, YOU SUBDUED THE REGIONAL WARLORDS TO BECOME THE DE FACTO CENTRAL POWER OF AURORA.
SCORE!
DUDE!
HIGH-FIVE!


THE ARMIES YOU FORGED OUT OF LOOSE-KNIT MILITIAS AND MERCENARIES NOW ACT AS YOUR IRON FIST, WIELDING YOUR MIGHT FROM SEA TO SEA ACROSS THE CONTINENT!
KEWL!
ROCK ON!
HUZZAH!

NOW, YOUR PROGRAMS OF NAVAL REFORM AND ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION OF THE SOUTHERN LANDS MAY NOT BE COMPLETE, BUT THAT'S DUE MORE TO GAME TIME CONSTRAINTS THAN ANY LACK OF EFFORT...
ACES!
SWEET!
HEY NONNY NONNY NONNY!




UNFORTUNATELY, SINCE THE ONLY GOAL OF THE ADVENTURE WAS TO RESCUE THE PRINCESS...
OH. RIGHT.
I DO HOPE SHE'S DOING OK...
DRAGONS AREN'T THAT DANGEROUS, ARE THEY?

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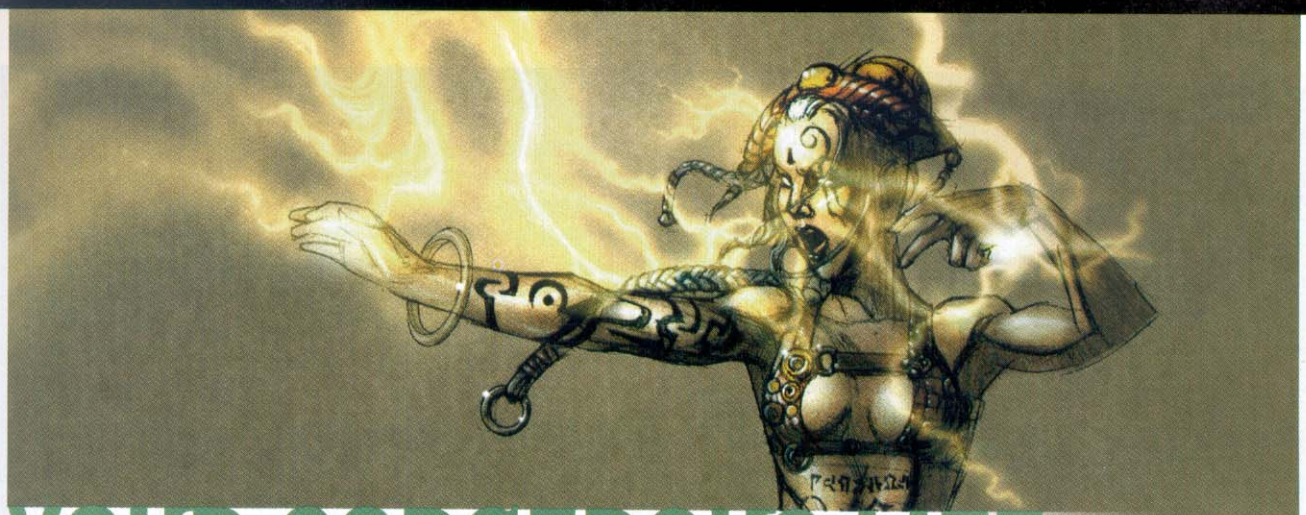


YOUR SORCEROUS LIFE

Take Out Your #2 Pencils . . .

by Robin D. Laws • illustrated by Carlo Arellano

You did not choose to become a sorcerer. The talent for magic lay within you even in the cradle. No one taught you how to shape and channel your gift. When it first manifested itself, you were probably terrified. Even if you took it in stride, it is unlikely that those around you did. You were probably taunted by cruel playmates and fearful adults. Perhaps you were attacked. It's possible that your family cast you out, certain that your powers would bring doom upon them. As you made your way through a hostile world, gradually learning to master your abilities, you learned to trust no one.

At some point, you learned about your rivals in the world of spellcasters: the wizards. They *choose* to use magic. They enjoy lengthy apprenticeships under learned masters who teach them not only the rudiments of magic but also introduce them to the world of their colleagues. Centuries of tradition set the proper etiquette for interactions between wizards. They know the proper forms of address to use with elders and peers. Although they might struggle against one another as part of the eternal battle between good and evil, one wizard does not assume all others are his enemies.

Alas, you learned the hard way that this is not the case with sorcerers. When you first met another sorcerer, you circled one another like wary wolves. Life's hard lessons burned the habits of distrust into you, and had clearly done the same to her. You did not know how to show her that you respected her and meant her no harm. Deep down, you think you perhaps did want to harm her, lash out, prove that you didn't want anyone else to be like you. The world made you a loner, a role to which you have grown accustomed.

But as your exploits continued, you realized that even you could not survive without allies. Whether you needed to defend yourself against enemies, delve into the earth where ancient secrets hide, or simply find a few moments of respite from your dark thoughts, you accepted the fact that even a loner needs friends. You've taught yourself to deal with others, including other sorcerers, as you tutored yourself in the ways of magic: by painstaking trial and error. The errors have been many, but you have pieced together a way of accommodating yourself to others without sacrificing your pride or spirit of independence.

Before taking a look at how sorcerers interact with other characters, use the Past History Checklist to take your sorcerer character concept from the general to the specific.

Past History Checklist

The above description presents a cumulative impression of the lives of most sorcerers. To find out how much of it actually applies to your sorcerer character, use the following checklist. You can either choose the answers to each question, roll them randomly, or choose some and roll for others. A die type appears after each question; this is what you roll to get your random result. Don't confine yourself to the choices provided by the checklist. If they inspire ideas of your own, use them instead.

1. Were some of your ancestors sorcerers? *(d6)*

1-3 ☐ **No:** You were the first of your kind.
Go to question 2.

4-5 ☐ **Yes:** But it was a family secret, and you did not learn of it until many years later.
Go to question 1a.

6 ☐ **Yes:** You knew an older relative was also a sorcerer.
Go to question 1b.

1a. Why did your family hide its sorcerous lineage from you? *(d6)*

1-2 ☐ **Fear for your safety:** They knew others might hunt you down if anyone knew you have a sorcerer's blood in you.

3-4 ☐ **Denial:** They hoped that if you did not know you might be a sorcerer, it all would go away, and you could be normal after all.

5 ☐ **Ignorance:** It has been so long since a sorcerer was born into your family that none of your living relatives knew about the possibility.

6 ☐ **Shame:** The family sees sorcery as a curse so terrible that no one may speak of it.

Go to question 2.

1b. Who was the relative? *(d8)*

1 ☐ Mother
2 ☐ Father
3 ☐ Uncle
4 ☐ Aunt
5 ☐ Brother
6 ☐ Sister
7 ☐ Grandmother
8 ☐ Grandfather

Go to question 1c.

1c. What happened to this relative? *(d8)*

1 ☐ Murdered by your fearful neighbors.
2 ☐ Kidnapped by outlaws wanting to exploit her powers.
3 ☐ Tried and executed by the authorities for imagined crimes.
4 ☐ Tried and executed by the authorities for actual crimes.
5 ☐ Fled a hostile mob, never to return.
6 ☐ Left the community to pursue a life of adventure.
7 ☐ Lives out in the wilds surrounding your community, where she is occasionally consulted for magical aid by fearful neighbors.
8 ☐ Lives among the community, concealing her powers from others.

If your answer ranges from 1 to 6, go to question 2. Otherwise, go to question 1d.

Exceptions

For brevity's sake, the checklist makes certain assumptions about your character's background. Atypical sorcerers, which you are perfectly free to play, might have very different past experiences than the checklist would suggest.

If you grew up in wealthy, aristocratic, or royal circumstances, your family had the resources to shield you from others' fears and prejudices. They could pay another sorcerer handsomely to act as your master and surround you with bodyguards to protect you from any skullduggery on his part. Your parting from your master in this case was, at worst, uneventful.

You might also have grown up in a place where sorcerers are relatively common; if so, your neighbors might have shown you no more hostility or apprehension than they would a child with especially big ears or an unusual birthmark.

If a community reveres a sorcerer of the past as a great hero, you might have grown up not scorned, but privileged. Your family might have received a stipend of food or money to keep you clothed and healthy while you honed your gifts. If raiders came to spirit you away, your neighbors might have banded together to fight them off. They expect something in return for the help they've given you over the years: When trouble strikes your old home, someone will come to you, asking you to come save the day.

If you're an elf or were raised in an elven community, your childhood might have been much more comfortable than the one the checklist describes. You were encouraged to explore your sorcerous talents, which were seen as a gift from the god Corellon Larethian. You left your home not when you were driven out, but when an urge for exploration overtook you.

1d. When you began to show signs of the gift, why did your relative not help you? *(d8)*

1 ☐ Your relative died before you began to show the signs.
2 ☐ "If you are discovered, we will both be burned as witches."
3 ☐ "There is nothing one sorcerer can teach another. You must learn on your own."
4 ☐ "I will help you by giving you the best advice I know: Get out of here, as soon as you can!"
5 ☐ Your gifts were greater than your relative's, and she was too envious to help.
6 ☐ Your relative was greedy and saw greater gain in trying to sell you to cruel captors who would exploit your burgeoning powers.
7 ☐ Your relative tried to help but did not know how.
8 ☐ Your relative gave you some help and made the years of manifestation easier for you than they otherwise might have been.

Go to question 2.

2. What kinds of omens attended your birth? *(d8)*

1-4 ☐ **Ill:** A storm raged; snakes crawled into homes; milk turned sour; whippoorwills keened.

5-6 ☐ **Fortuitous:** You were born on a lucky day when the skies were clear and bright. The next harvest was an unusually good one.

7-8 ☐ **None:** There was no clue at your birth that you were anything but a normal child.

Go to question 3.

3. Aside from omens at birth (if any), what was the first sign that you were different from other children? *(d8)*

1 ☐ Dogs and horses started to attack you whenever they could.
2 ☐ A visiting elven woman's hair turned white when she saw you.
3 ☐ Objects began to move around in your presence as if of their own volition.
4 ☐ You brought a dying sparrow to life just by holding it in your clasped hands.
5 ☐ Strange lights danced around your home in the dark of night.
6 ☐ Other children started to have accidents not long after annoying or bullying you.
7 ☐ A crazy, dirty-robed old hermit who said he worshiped the forest spirits came to your home to offer you a leather bag full of feathers, odd-shaped stones, and animal bones.

DEALING WITH OTHERS

By the time you're ready to adventure, you've already undergone a titanic struggle to achieve self-discipline. With nothing more than your iron will, you manipulate forces of magic great enough to tear you apart. Compared to that trick, it takes little mental self-control to hold back when insulted or threatened, even if such incidents do summon up unpleasant memories. It is this supreme confidence that creates your personal magnetism, making others instinctively want to obey you.

Always keep in mind that you have goals greater than avenging yourself against petty insults. Whether you want to find a powerful artifact, receive a bounty for capturing a local outlaw, or rescue a prince, you have better things to do than replay every childhood altercation you ever suffered through. If you go around casually attacking everyone who looks at you sideways, you'll soon find it impossible to buy gear, gather information, or find a room for the night. It is far better to keep petty matters in perspective.

Dealing With Commoners

When dealing with ordinary folk, you rely on your hard-won confidence and self-discipline. Your spirit is mightier than theirs; you do not attempt to conceal this fact from them, but neither do you need to flaunt it. You speak in clear, pleasant, ringing tones. You never browbeat people; the power in your silken voice is all the threat you need.

You understand that most commoners will fear you if they know who you are. There is both advantage and danger in their terror. If you push them too far, they'll lash out at you, or at least refuse your request. You can't order them to do things that grossly violate their sense of self-preservation, like abandoning their homes or risking their lives to protect you from monsters. You can, however, make them want to perform minor tasks for you, from providing information to giving you temporary shelter.

Most ordinary folk want to make powerful people happy. Show them your largess by generously dispensing coins to those who please you. Assure them that you'll use your magic on their behalf if enemies come calling.

Dealing With Other Adventurers

When sizing up other adventurers, you must quickly determine their power relative to yours, as well as the honesty of their intentions. When you encounter someone who might be able to hurt or kill you, you must retain your calm and confidence while reining in your natural arrogance. Speak in soothing, friendly tones, even to individuals you think mean you harm. Trick them into thinking you're not ready to strike. If you're sure another adventurer is an enemy, wait until she drops her guard before hitting her with your most damaging spell. Even better, talk your way out of trouble. Warriors seek fights; the clever sorcerer wages battle only when the conditions are right.

You've learned, from the adventuring band you belong to, that other people can be of use, on occasion. You've trained yourself to hide your resentments and sense of superiority when dealing with them. Even well-meaning, good-aligned adventurers can lash out in deadly fashion when tired and annoyed, especially if they think you're insulting them. To avoid unnecessary trouble, treat them fairly, give them every reason to trust you—and be ready to defend yourself when their moods sour.

If you're like most sorcerers, you might find it difficult to conceal your scathing contempt when dealing with wizards. Their smug self-approval makes your sense of superiority look mild by comparison. They've been trained to consider themselves the stable, rational masters of occult science, and to look at sorcerers as hot-tempered, dangerous freaks of nature. You might ache to show them the error of their ways, but you must always stop first and ask yourself whether a volley of *fireballs* is really in your best interest. Just remind yourself that wizards can't help being pedantic, egotistical fussbudgets, any more than you can change the things that shaped your own character, so many years ago.

8 ☐ A rainbow-bearded figure kept appearing in your dreams. One night, he spoke to you directly, revealing that he was Boccob, god of magic.

Go to question 4.

4. What happened when your powers first manifested? *(d8)*

1 ☐ The object of your first adolescent crush got a terrible fever and almost died. When he recovered, he told his parents that he'd dreamt of you hovering over his bed, like a dark and glowering raven.

2 ☐ Kobold ambushers attacked you and some of your friends. Fire shot from your fingertips, setting the dry grass around them alight.

3 ☐ One day you realized that you knew what everyone around you was thinking.

4 ☐ After threatening to beat you, the village bully erupted in hideous boils and then went blind.

5 ☐ During an intense conversation with your best friend, he recoiled in shock, saying that your features had changed to resemble his.

6 ☐ As you touched a family heirloom, it turned to ice and shattered in your hands.

7 ☐ A black cat started following you and would not go away. You found you could make it follow instructions just by concentrating on them.

8 ☐ A pounding hailstorm descended on your community. Even though you were caught out in it, not a single hailstone hit you.

Go to question 5.

5. Why did you finally leave your home? *(d8)*

1-2 ☐ You fled for your life as pitchfork-wielding neighbors tried to capture you in order to burn or drown you as a witch.

3-4 ☐ You were cast out by your own family.

5 ☐ You grew tired of your neighbors' foolish superstitions and suspicions.

6 ☐ You wanted to find someone who could help mold your still uncontrolled powers.

7 ☐ A world of exciting adventure beckoned.

8 ☐ You swore vengeance on a passing evildoer who hurt or slew someone you loved.

Go to question 6.

6. Did you find another sorcerer to help you hone your powers? *(d8)*

1-2 ☐ **No:** You never met another sorcerer until after you solved your problems by yourself.
Go to question 7.

3-4 ☐ **No:** You found a sorcerer who promised to help you, but you realized he just meant to rob and slay you in the night.
Go to question 7.

5-6 ☐ **No:** All of the sorcerers you encountered seemed to think you meant to betray them and quickly sent you on your way.

7-8 ☐ **Yes.**
Go to question 6a.

6a. Who was this mentor? *(d8)*

1 ☐ A saintly figure who wished to do for another what her equally benevolent mentor had done for her so many years ago.

2 ☐ A selfish individual who just wanted someone to lift, tote, scrape, and clean for her.

3 ☐ A servitor of evil who wanted to mold you into a servant of chaos and destruction.

4 ☐ A sorcerer whose talent had faded but wished to experience vicarious power through your exploits.

5 ☐ A tortured soul who treated you with teary-eyed kindness or red-faced fury depending on her capricious moods.

6 ☐ A vengeful killer who believed sorcerers should rule and sought you as a lieutenant in her maniacal schemes.

7 ☐ A bored prankster who thought your training might provide her some amusement.

8 ☐ A hardened loner who, despite her first instincts, came to see you as a kindred spirit deserving of the help she never got.

Go to question 6b.

Reining It In

The advice in the checklist is addressed to your character; here are some notes for you, the player. The trick in playing a sorcerer is to portray his dark past and resentful nature without annoying the other players or refusing to participate in the DM's plotlines.

You probably noticed that the checklist steers your sorcerer in a particular direction: Although he might not be the sunniest or most altruistic character, he ends up in a mood to cooperate with his fellow player characters. He might still mistrust them, but he more likely sees them as honored comrades. This is not to say that every sorcerer ends up a more-or-less happy member of an adventuring band. The checklist is skewed towards creating playable PCs. It's more fun to play characters who get along with the other party members.

Pay attention to the moods of the DM and other players when you're spotlighting your sorcerer's purring arrogance or smoldering bitterness. If they seem to be getting annoyed, tone it down. Remember that there's a difference between playing a self-centered character and engaging in self-centered play. It's one thing to have an attitude but another to derail the group with squabbling. Give other PCs leeway to tweak your character's arrogance without his flying into a dangerous rage.

A good example of this in another genre is the character of Wolverine, from the X-Men. He might show hostility to some teammates and occasional disdain for authority, but he ultimately cares about the others and works for the general success of the group. That's the same kind of balance you need to strike when playing a character with the kind of troubled past described in the checklist.

6b. Why did you finally break with your mentor? *(d10)*

1 ☐ You didn't. You still go to her for advice and companionship.
Go to question 7.

2 ☐ She was slain by your mutual enemies.
Go to question 7.

3 ☐ She just disappeared one day; your searches for her have been to no avail.
Go to question 7.

4 ☐ You learned all that you could, and the two agreed that it was time for you to stand on your own.
Go to question 7.

5 ☐ She falsely believed that you intended to betray her.
Go to question 6c.

6 ☐ You caught her laying a trap for you.
Go to question 6c.

7-8 ☐ She caught you laying a trap for her.
Go to question 6c.

9 ☐ The two of you got into a foolish quarrel over nothing that soon escalated.
Go to question 6c.

10 ☐ She found another apprentice she claimed to like better and told you to pack up your things and go.
Go to question 6c.

6c. What happened during your final confrontation? *(d8)*

1 ☐ You exchanged harsh words, but neither blows nor *magic missiles*. The two of you parted on bitter terms.

2 ☐ After a long standoff, you both agreed to back away so that neither would be slain.

3 ☐ You battled, and she nearly killed you. You still don't understand what impulse of mercy prevented her from delivering the killing blow.

4 ☐ You battled and both were nearly killed. You crawled off to lick your wounds and have not seen her since.

5 ☐ You battled, and your first salvo was a lucky one. It severely wounded her. She escaped, swearing to wreak vengeance on you when she recovered.

6 ☐ The two of you battled, and you nearly killed her. You couldn't bring yourself to finish her off and left in disgust.

7 ☐ You slew her in honest battle.

8 ☐ You slew her through trickery, which was the only way you could possibly have beaten her.

Go to question 7.

7. As your powers increased, you found that other people began to heed your words. How did you react to this discovery? *(d6)*

1 ☐ Deciding that they must be trying to trick you somehow, you recoiled. You avoided settlements and towns even more carefully than before.

2 ☐ You reveled in your sudden power over people and decided to fleece them like the pitiful sheep they'd shown themselves to be.

3 ☐ You were troubled, knowing that they reacted well to you because a persuasive demeanor is just part of a sorcerer's bag of tricks. You fear that you will never find true love or friendship, instead receiving only the false respect and affection generated by your powers.

4-5 ☐ You found it convenient. Although you never make the mistake of thinking them your equals, you decided it would be hypocritical to bully them as their kind had bullied you.

6 ☐ Although distrustful at first, you eventually came to bask in the sudden acceptance of others. You found it an enormous relief to be welcomed back into the civilized world.

Go to question 8.

8. What happened the first time you met another sorcerer? *(d6)*

1 ☐ You spoke briefly and then parted. He wanted to do you harm; you could see it in his eyes.

2 ☐ You conversed in a friendly but formal manner until you suddenly moved your hand. He attacked you, and you barely escaped with your life. You were only going to scratch an itch!

3 ☐ He convinced you to ally with him, but then he cheated you out of your fair share of the treasure you gained together.

4 ☐ You tried to befriend him, but he showed you a scar running down the side of his neck and said he'd learned never to trust another sorcerer.

5 ☐ You worked together briefly, then quarreled and parted.

6 ☐ You went together into a town. As soon as the locals saw him, they mobbed the both of you, murder in their eyes. You tried to rescue him, but were finally forced to flee to protect your own hide. You still don't know what he'd done to make them react that way.

Go to question 9.

9. Finally, you fell in with a group of adventurers who were also just beginning their careers. What did you think of them when you first met? *(d6)*

1-2 ☐ Finally you had found a group of people you could trust.

End checklist.

3 ☐ They were rough and unruly, but they could be slowly bent to your will.

Go to question 9a.

4-5 ☐ They had goals similar to your own and could be useful allies. You would keep your distance from them until they proved themselves trustworthy.

Go to question 9a.

6 ☐ You would trust them as far as you could throw them.

Go to question 9a.

9a. How do you feel about them now? *(d6)*

1-4 ☐ They have proven themselves many times over. You might not trust anyone else, but your comrades-in-arms warrant your unquestioned loyalty.

5 ☐ They are still rough around the edges but mean well. They are slowly winning your affection.

6 ☐ There is still a gulf of mistrust between you and your comrades, but you will deal with them fairly until they give you reason to do otherwise.

End checklist.

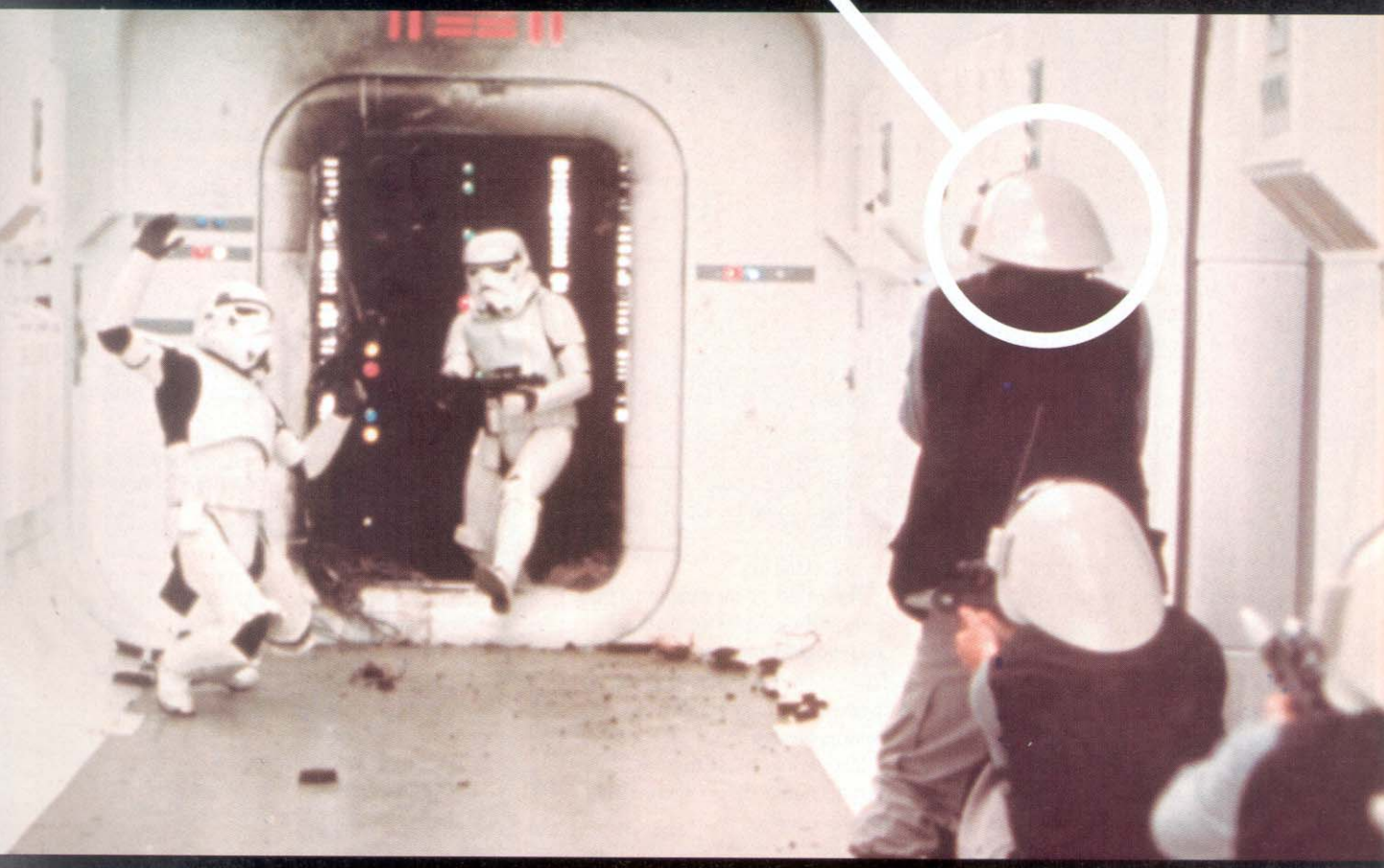
TOP TEN SORCERERS IN FANTASY LITERATURE

by Johnny Wilson

Many of the most interesting magic-users in fantasy literature are actually sorcerers. They haven't studied formally and their power comes from within. Here is our list. Send your lists to **scalemail@wizards.com.**

1. Merlin in Thomas A. Barron's *The Lost Years of Merlin* series. (We usually think of Merlin as the old, wise teacher, but Barron casts him as a hero discovering the power within.)
2. Bink in Piers Anthony's *A Spell for Chameleon.* (He thought he was devoid of magic until he discovered his personal gift.)
3. Terisa Morgan in Stephen R. Donaldson's *Mirror of Her Dreams.* (The most passive magic-user this side of Thomas Covenant, Terisa learns the secret of using glass to transform reality.)
4. Sparrowhawk in Ursula K. LeGuin's *Wizard of Earthsea.* (Before he knew the power words, he unleashed destructive power.)
5. Thomas Covenant in Stephen R. Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant.* (He could wield the white magic, but faced uncertain results.)
6. Harry Potter in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. (He is learning to be a wizard, but uses innate power before he is trained.)
7. Skeeve in Robert Asprin's *Myth-Adventures* series. (He can use magic, but his aborted apprenticeship causes the results to be unpredictable.)
8. Pol Detson in Roger Zelazny's *Madwand.* (As the title implies, this sorcerer is so untrained in thaumaturgy that fellow magic-users call him a "madwand.")
9. Travis Wilder in Mark Anthony's *The Last Rune* series. (His inner power flows out through the runes he discovers and learns to "speak.")
10. Polgara in David Edding's *Polgara the Sorceress.* (She learns to transform herself after communing with a prehistoric tree.)

WHAT'S THIS GUY'S STORY?



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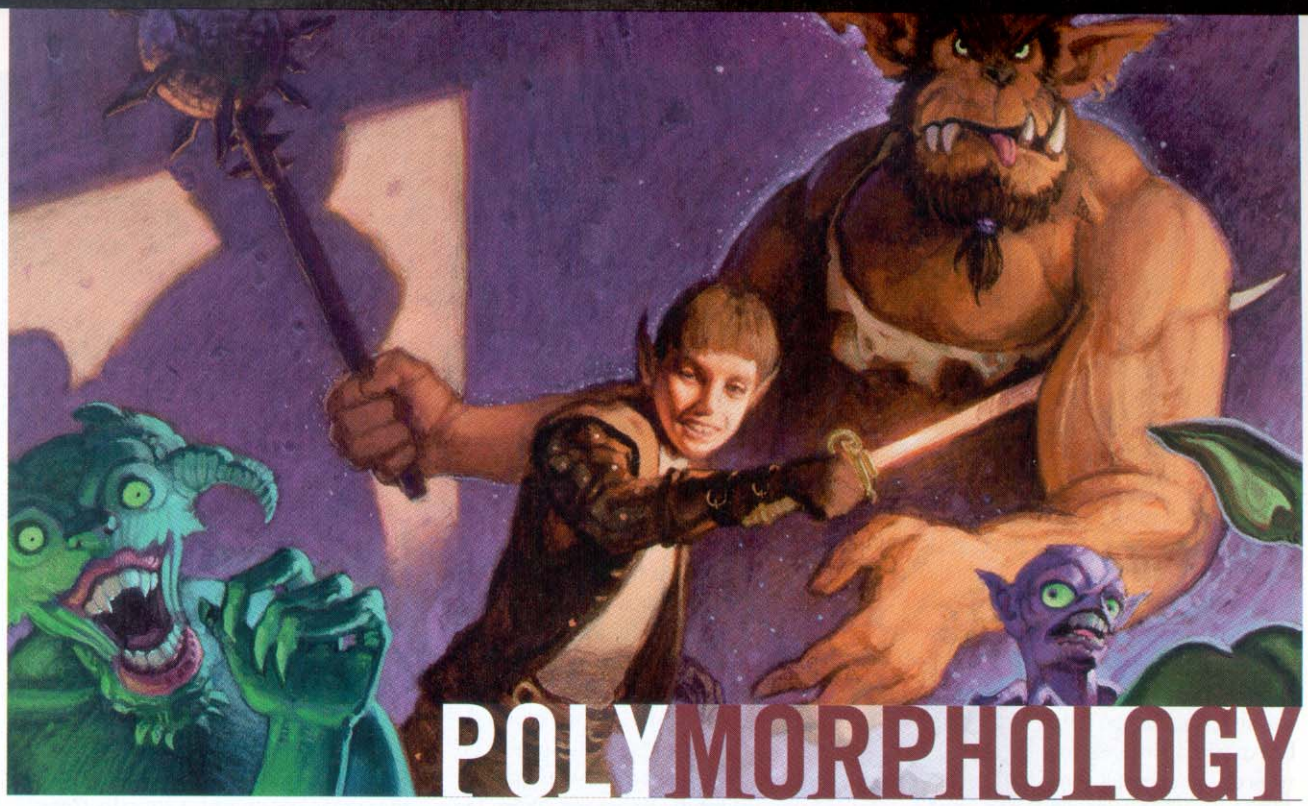


POLYMORPHOLOGY

Change for the Sake of Change

by Johnathan Richards • illustrated by Darrell Riche

Polymorph transmutation remains one of the most versatile types of arcane magic, for the possibilities are limited only by the number of different forms you can achieve. With the vastness of the animal kingdom to choose from, many acts are possible through the use of polymorphing magic. Thus, you can choose from countless strategies when using four specific spells: polymorph self, polymorph other, shapechange, *and* polymorph any object.

When using *polymorph self*, the spellcaster assumes creature forms ranging in size between 6 inches and one size category larger than her normal form. (For Medium-size spellcasters, this means an upper limit of 16 feet.) The spellcaster gains only the physical and natural abilities of the new form, preventing brilliant schemes like polymorphing into a winter wolf and trying to breathe a blast of frost upon his enemies. *Polymorph self* has the advantage of allowing the spellcaster to switch forms as a full-round action; as an added bonus, the spellcaster regains some lost hit points after the initial transformation.

Polymorph other has the same size restrictions as *polymorph self* and is limited in that the spell recipient transforms only once. In addition, if the recipient is an unwilling participant to the polymorphing process, she receives a Fortitude save to avoid the transformation.

The *shapechange* spell allows the caster to almost fully become any creature—including having access to all of the new form's extraordinary (but not supernatural or spell-like) abilities. The size limit bar is also raised to 200 feet.

Finally, while the 8th-level spell *polymorph any object* can be used simply as a more powerful version of *polymorph other*, it can also change objects into animals (or vice versa) for a limited time.

POLYMORPH SELF

Flexibility

One of the main advantages of polymorph-related magic is its usefulness in a wide variety of situations. Need to scale a cliff? *Spider climb* would do the trick, but so would *polymorph self* if you took the form of a giant ant or spider. Need to cross a raging river? The form of a seal ought to do the trick. With the whole of the animal kingdom to choose from, there's a useful form for just about any situation.

Deception

By taking the form of an animal, you can hide the fact that the party contains someone capable of casting arcane spells. There are several ways to employ this strategy.

Hide in plain sight. The easiest way to blend into the background is to take the form of an animal that one would normally expect to find in the company of an adventuring party. A horse, mule, or another draft animal would be a good choice. If the party is going to be attacked by a band of orcs, it could be helpful to have a "hidden" wizard in the party who can attack when the enemy doesn't expect it. Imagine the look on the orcs' faces when the pack mule suddenly reverts to humanoid form and starts hurling spells at them!

Another useful type of animal is one that fits in with another character's skills or class. If one of the party's members trains falcons, taking the form

of a falcon is unlikely to cause suspicion. Assuming the form of a familiar or a ranger's or druid's animal companion is similarly innocuous. On the other hand, most adventurers don't go around accompanied by a troll or a beholder.

Divert suspicion to others in the party. If your party wants to keep its wizard or sorcerer hidden, make it look like another party member is the wizard. A rogue carrying a wizard's spellbook and accompanied by a familiar is likely to be mistaken for a wizard. While the enemy cleric is busy throwing *silence* spells at the bogus spellcaster, the "familiar" can get in a good surprise attack well out of range of the *silence* spell's area of effect.

Just plain hide. Of course, the easiest thing to do is remain out of sight. By polymorphing into a rat, you might hide under a companion's hat, in an open backpack, or in a variety of places where you can still see what's going on without making your presence known. As a snake, you can wind around another character's arm, hidden for the most part by a sleeve with just your head poking out. Giant centipedes are relatively flat; if you polymorphed into that form, you might ride unnoticed on someone's back.

Scare Tactics

Sometimes, it's in your best interest to get the enemy to flee rather than fight. There are several varieties of scare tactics, each useful in its own way:

The tailor-made scare. This type of scare tactic works best when you're up against a well-known adversary and you can play off of his fears. If you're battling an arachnophobe, there's no better form to take than a giant spider. If you're harassed by bandits in a land inhabited by werewolves, taking the form of a dire wolf (preferably in full view of the bandits) is a good idea. Many people are frightened of bats or snakes. Be sure that you've taken an appropriate shape, since becoming a giant toad does little good if your enemy isn't daunted by them.

The generic scare. Playing against an enemy's specific fear is always a good strategy, but sometimes his specific fear isn't known; worse yet, he might not have one. In that case, there are several generic forms that, while they might not scare an enemy, will at least give him pause.

- **Poisonous creatures.** Even though the *polymorph self* spell does not allow the spellcaster to become poisonous after adopting a poisonous form, this won't stop adversaries from worrying about the possibility when confronted by a giant cobra or giant scorpion. This is especially true if the enemy doesn't see you change form—then she'll have no idea it's you or some creature you summoned. This ploy works best if it's common knowledge that the animal is poisonous.
- **Rabid creatures.** While the *polymorph self* spell does not let you become a rabid creature, it's not difficult to appear rabid. You need only take the form of a mammal, twitch an awful lot, and drool heavily. Working up a good foam at the mouth is also suggested. Most people give rabid-looking creatures a wide berth, especially in a world where rabies is sure to be untreatable except by divine magic.
- **Obviously tough creatures.** Often, an enemy will back off if it seems he's about to face an opponent he's obviously unable to defeat. A red dragon of great wyrm status would make a good choice, but unfortunately that's outside the size range of the *polymorph self* spell. Several powerful creatures within the size restrictions of the *polymorph self* spell are good choices: beholders, mind flayers, vampires, medusae, and trolls to name a few. Armor-clad opponents have been known to flee at the sight of a rust monster. As always, it's important to ensure that the enemy is familiar with the form adopted, as a rust monster is not likely to scare off an enemy who's never seen one before.

Another important thing to bear in mind is that the *polymorph self* spell only allows you to adopt the non-magical, physical means of movement of any new form. Thus, while you could polymorph into a blink dog, you could not use its abilities unless you had cast *blink* on yourself prior to assuming the form of the blink dog. Note that it's important to read the descriptions for monsters in the *Monster Manual* carefully. The beholder, for example, is naturally buoyant, meaning that if you polymorphed yourself into a beholder, you would float and move like a beholder because the creature can do that as a natural function of its body. You would not need to cast *levitate* on yourself to maintain the charade.

Escape

Sometimes, the best you can hope for is to escape with your hide—that is, your real skin. Perhaps you're down to a few hit points, you've depleted your offensive spells, and now you need to run away and live to fight another day. The ability to polymorph can be invaluable in these instances.

Traveling without being followed. One of the easiest ways to escape is to adopt a shape that allows you a movement form not possessed by your enemies. Taking flight as a bird or flying insect can be helpful if your enemy is incapable of flight. Similarly, taking the form of a marine animal can aid escape from an opponent who can't swim. Often, a more subtle movement ability is enough to get away. Becoming a squirrel can allow you to escape among the upper canopy of a forest's trees; taking the form of a snake might permit escape down a narrow burrow or even allow cover in tall grass. A form allowing vertical movement, like a spider or beetle, can permit escape up a cliff, wall, or the side of a building.

Blending into a crowd. One way to lose an enemy is to take the form of a creature already present in great numbers. When chased on a beach, become a sea gull and blend in with the flock flying along the shoreline. When pursued through a pasture, become a sheep, horse, or cow (as appropriate), and lose yourself in the herd. When underwater, join a school of fish. "Safety in numbers" doesn't always mean that the greater number of creatures can overcome a single foe; sometimes the safety lies in the enemy's not knowing who to attack.

This tactic can be carried over to the enemy's form, especially when dealing with creatures of limited intelligence. When trapped in a pit with dozens of hungry dire rats, polymorphing into a dire rat might confuse the others and prevent them from attacking.

Money-Making Schemes

For those without scruples, or those truly desperate for quick currency, polymorphing spells can offer a means of income. Most of these schemes require the assistance of at least one partner, as you remain in the form of

Easy Money—Loose Ethics
If you aren't above performing scams on your fellow citizen, the ability to polymorph can be very profitable.

an animal for the duration of the ploy.

The "trained animal" ploy. This scheme requires a partner, preferably someone practiced in the fine art of smooth-talking (the Bluff skill comes in handy here). The partner assumes the role of an animal trainer, while you assume the form of an appropriate animal and put on a street-side performance. There are numerous variations on the ploy: You might become a dancing bear or a super-intelligent horse able to tap out the answer to mathematical problems with a hoof. Perhaps the onlookers are challenged to place a bet against the amazing chess-playing monkey.

The "exotic animal from afar" ploy. This scam requires a partner, a cage, and a tent. You polymorph into an exotic beast from afar (good choices include unicorns, ropers, dragonnes, or sahuagin), climb into a cage, and the partner charges admission to see the marvelous creature. Obviously, this works better on peasant villages than in areas where the knowledge of magnificent creatures is common.

The "animal for sale" ploy. One of the easiest ways to make a quick bit of cash is to sell yourself in animal form. Warhorses can bring in a couple of hundred gold pieces; pegasi, hatchling dragons, pseudodragons, and owlbear chicks can be sold for even more. Of course, after the sale is complete and the victim walks off with his new purchase, you wait until your new "owner" is distracted and quickly assume a new shape. One minute, the poor sap is leading his fine new warhorse through the marketplace; the next, his horse is nowhere to be seen . . . but there's a rat scampering down a nearby alley.

The "rampaging monster" ploy. In the form of a powerful monster (devil, wyvern, or so on), you make your presence known to a nearby village. Along comes a heroic knight (your accomplice), willing to rid the village of the threat—for a price. Once the villagers agree, the knight "battles" the monster, "slaying" it and taking the reward. This ploy works best if the schemers can work out a way to "slay" the rampaging monster without giving the villagers access to its dead body. Perhaps the knight's "magic sword" has a special "disintegration" power; you can easily polymorph from rampaging monster to harmless snake and slither out of view.

The "magic lamp" ploy. If you can create a puff of smoke and become invisible, your accomplice might be able to sell a rusty old lamp for an exorbitant fee if you temporarily appear as a genie, efreet, or similar creature. You need only appear once (after the accomplice rubs the lamp to "summon" the wish-granting creature) to demonstrate the lamp's ability, then "disappear" back into the lamp until after the sale is made. For extra cruelty, you can leave a *magic mouth* on the lamp that says, "Go away! Leave me alone, mortal!" in your genie-voice, activated whenever anyone rubs the lamp.

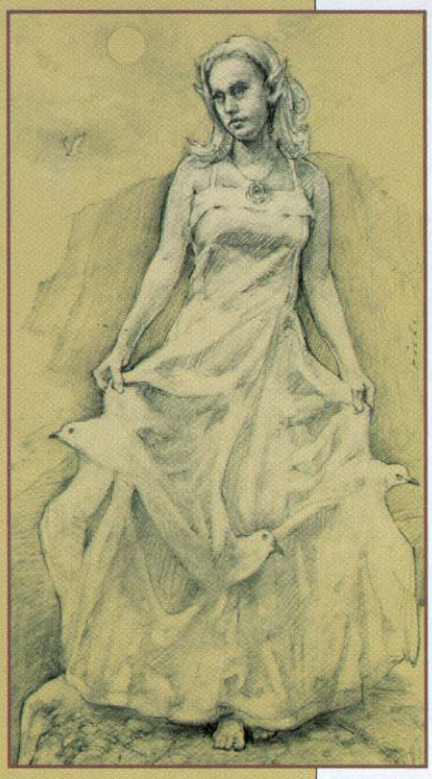
General Utility

One great advantage of the *polymorph self* spell is that it allows for more than one form. Thus, as new situations arise, you can adopt a new form best suited for that particular situation. The following are just a few useful creature forms, showcasing the spell's overall diversity.

Black pudding, ochre jelly, gray ooze: These forms are great for sliding underneath locked doors and crawling along walls and ceilings. With its dark coloration, the black pudding also blends easily into shadows, while the

SWARM FORM

Transmutation
Level: Sor/Wiz 5
Components: V
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Personal
Target: You
Duration: 1 hour/level (D)



The *swarm form* spell allows you to transform your body and all worn and carried possessions into a swarm like that created by the *summon swarm* spell. Casting the spell initially restores lost hit points as if you had rested for a full day.

You can transform yourself into any of the animals or vermin listed in the *summon swarm* spell. You can also choose any other Tiny or smaller animal or vermin to compose the swarm instead. The swarm must be composed of the same type of creature. Even though you inhabit a large number of bodies at the same time, the swarm acts as a single entity; you cannot direct different individual creatures from the swarm to perform different acts, and you roll once for saving throws. As a single entity, the swarm has the same hit point total and saving throw modifiers as the caster. The size of the swarm is equal to the size of the caster. You have the speed and movement type of the creature chosen.

The swarm must move as a unit (the caster could not have each member in the swarm all go in different directions, for example). If a portion (up to 49%) of the swarm is separated from the main body by some means, the smaller portion of the swarm dies (though you do not suffer any hit point loss because of it). If the swarm is separated into two equal halves, the DM should determine randomly which half of the swarm dies. The remaining portion expands to the caster's size no matter how much of the swarm was lost.

You can pour over enemies (enter their square), doing damage as per the *summon swarm* spell. Regardless of what creature you chose to compose the swarm, your *swarm form* deals *summon swarm* damage. Creatures immune to poison do not take damage from your *swarm form* if the creature you chose is poisonous. Targets of your *swarm form* get no save. Spell resistance does not apply. The *swarm form* damage is a spell effect so damage reduction does not apply. Spellcasting and concentrating on spells is impossible within the swarm.

While in *swarm form,* you are subject to magic that affects the creature type comprising the swarm. (Thus, as a swarm of bees the *repel vermin* spell would keep you at bay.) Spells that target one creature or total Hit Dice less than your character level have no effect. (*Charm person or animal* would fail. *Mass charm* might work.) Note that you cannot be dispersed by a *gust of wind* or *stinking cloud* as outlined in the spell *summon swarm.*

As a swarm, you cannot be fought effectively with weapons, but fire and damaging area effect spells cause normal damage. You cannot cast spells with verbal, somatic, material, or focus components while in swarm form. (Note that this does not rule out certain spells prepared using the metamagic feats Silent Spell and Still Spell.)

At the end of the spell's duration, or when you voluntarily return to normal form, the swarm merges back together, reforming your body.

gray ooze is easily mistaken for a patch of wet stone.

Centaur, lamia: Each of these forms allows you to retain a pair of humanoid arms and a voice to allow spellcasting. They also have the advantage of good speed.

Giraffe: This is a good form to adopt at the bottom of a pit trap to provide an easy way out for your companions.

Harpy: This form lets you cast spells while granting flight ability. Even though no song-based powers are granted by the *polymorph self* spell, your enemies might still waste time covering their ears.

Monkey: The monkey form allows some manipulation, not only with hands but feet as well. In fact, with adequate practice, you might be able to hang from your tail and bring all four manipulative appendages to bear on the task at hand.

Parrot: A parrot form offers several advantages. Not only can a parrot fly and talk, but its four-toed claws are capable of some manipulation. These last two abilities permit you to grasp and activate relatively lightweight magical items (such as wands and rings). Parrots come in many colors, including those with nondescript black or gray plumage, so you can be stealthy if need be. The parrot's vocal abilities permit further spellcasting, with the exception of those spells requiring somatic gestures.

Pegasus: The pegasus is an excellent riding mount, providing flight ability not only to you but also to one or two companions. A pegasus can carry up to 900 pounds while airborne—a useful ability in getting a large party across a wide river or over a mountain range, even if it means making several trips.

POLYMORPH OTHER

Attacking Enemies

The *polymorph other* spell's obvious use is as a means of attack, turning a powerful enemy into something inoffensive, like a butterfly, snail, or toad. Of course, turning a trusted companion into a powerful creature (like an achaierai, with a claw attack that does 2d6+2 points of damage or a bite that deals 4d6+2 points of damage) and turning her loose on your enemies is also possible.

A spellcaster can return a polymorphed creature to its natural form with another *polymorph other* spell, but most people aren't willing to take the chance of being stuck in another form for the rest of their lives. *Polymorph other* does have a duration of permanent.

Combined with Dominate

One way to safely use the "power boosting" effects of the *polymorph other* spell is to use it on an enemy. If your foe gets stuck in a monster's body for the rest of his life, it's no great loss. Of course, no one in his right

mind would willingly give an enemy that much power unless he was sure he could control that power.

The surest way to control a powerful polymorphed enemy is to hit her with a *dominate person* spell before changing her form. Once the domination is in effect, then it's safe to polymorph her into something fearsome and dangerous. If *dominate person* isn't available, you can always polymorph her first and then try your luck with a *dominate monster*, but if she shrugs off the *dominate* spell, all you've done is make her more powerful than she was to begin with.

Keep in mind that the *polymorph other* spell allows you to transform someone only into a creature ranging from Diminutive to one size larger than her original form. Thus, a Medium-size humanoid cannot be polymorphed into a Gargantuan purple worm or a Colossal red dragon.

Third-Party Monsters

Sometimes it's worth taking a chance if the odds are against you. Suppose your party is hopelessly outnumbered by a tribe of orc barbarians in a forest. Rather than polymorph a party member into a powerful form and risk sticking him that way, or polymorph an orc into something powerful and run the risk that you won't be able to control him afterward, use that *polymorph other* on a third-party creature and take advantage of the ensuing chaos. If the orcs are riding horses, change one of them into an owlbear and see what happens. This works best when the target creature is closer to your enemies than to you, and when there's more enemies than heroes. After all, if the suddenly polymorphed creature is going to strike out randomly, isn't it best to stack the deck in your favor?

All of the "scare tactic" ploys from the *polymorph self* section abovework well here. Imagine what an arachnophobe will do when you change his horse into a large spider! How about the snake-fearing sorceress whose owl familiar suddenly becomes a boa constrictor?

The Indirect Attack

Sometimes you need not use your *polymorph other* spell directly against your enemy to cause him harm. What about when your foe is riding his flying steed in aerial battle against you, and you polymorph the steed into an animal incapable of flight?

Naturally, this works in reverse. You might wish to upgrade your warhorse to a pegasus when your enemies are chasing you off a cliff.

Your enemies' earthborn riding mounts also make good targets. Many creatures inflict damage upon others that merely come into contact with them. What would happen if you turned a halfling's riding dog into a porcupine or a quill-covered howler?

Frightening Off Foes

Just seeing a fate worse than death occur to one of their compatriots might be enough to convince others to flee. For instance, you might polymorph an orc chieftain into an elf, then call out, "Okay, who's next?" What right-minded orc wants to take the chance of spending the rest of his days as an elf? Polymorphing an elf into a slobbering orc is likely to have the same effect on other elves in the vicinity.

Depending on your campaign world, there might be enough animosity between the humanoid races that elves and orcs aren't the only races with which this ploy works; it can be used with equal success against dwarves and goblins or kobolds and gnomes. Sometimes it might work only one way: A kobold probably wouldn't object to becoming a troll, but no troll is going to want to experience the remainder of its life as a pathetic kobold.

General Utility

Some uses of *polymorph other* are strictly utilitarian. The spell can provide cheap transportation. Suppose you're lost in the desert and are attacked by a yuan-ti? One *polymorph other* spell later, the yuan-ti has become a camel perfectly suited for long-distance desert travel. (Of course, it's not likely to be a good-tempered camel, and convincing it to follow your orders might take some doing.) Suppose you're on a long sea voyage when your ship sinks in a storm. Polymorphing a crew member into a dolphin provides you with ocean-going transport that can keep you afloat and possibly get you to the nearest land. Of course, in situations where your life is dependent upon the polymorphed creature, it's always best to use a willing volunteer who knows you'll be able to return her to her normal form once you're out of danger.

SHAPECHANGE

Attacking Enemies

Shapechange is a much more powerful version of the *polymorph self* spell. The size limit expands to cover anything from the size of a flea to a creature up to 200 feet long, incorporeal forms can be assumed, and you gain the new shape's extraordinary abilities (like poison or acid), and keep your own.

This means that there are many creatures whose forms you can now adopt with powerful extraordinary abilities. For instance, the achaierai's physical combat abilities were discussed in the *polymorph other* section; using the *shapechange* spell, you also gain the achaierai's toxic black cloud attack that causes an additional 2d6 points of damage to non-achaierai and grants you the equivalent of a free *insanity* spell.

Many monsters have a powerful extraordinary attack that they can use only infrequently. As an example, the ankheg can spit a stream of acid that causes 4d4 points of damage, but it can do so only once every 6 hours. The manticore can loose a volley of six spikes from its tail each round, but it can only launch twenty-four spikes in a day. By using *shapechange,* you can use up the "numerically limited" attacks of a given form before moving on to the next form and taking advantage of its specialized attacks in turn.

Likewise, there are many different types of poisons: a quasit's venom affects Dexterity, an athach's poison affects Strength, and a giant bee's venom affects Constitution. By alternately shapechanging into creatures whose poison strikes at different attributes, you can diminish your opponent's combat abilities on several fronts. Furthermore, the venom of a pseudodragon or spider eater can make a victim helpless for days or weeks—plenty of time to finish them off at your leisure. Then there are the truly lethal poisons, like those of the pit fiend, which can cause death.

Camouflage

Since a mimic can adopt the shape of unliving items—chests, armor, and even a door frame—you can adopt the shape of a mimic disguised as a treasure chest or a mimic disguised as a barrel.

Even if this is not practical, a mimic's normal form resembles granite, and this might be enough camouflage to suit your purposes. This comes in handy when trying to avoid pursuit by someone who knows you can assume the forms of animal shapes; they'll be focused on looking for an animal and ignore any non-living forms.

Money-Making Schemes

Since *shapechange* allows you to take the forms of creatures up to 200 feet long, simple extortion becomes an easy matter. You need only become a 200-foot-long dragon of your favorite color, fly to the nearest village, and demand tribute to ensure the village's continued survival. Good-aligned spellcasters should probably not use this ploy.

Don't Mess With Me!

The legendary tarrasque is an excellent form to assume when you wish to convince others to let you be. After all, who wants to provoke a monster that can inflict such massive amounts of damage? If simply transforming into the tarrasque isn't enough, note that all of the tarrasque's combat abilities are extraordinary except its frightful presence. If your enemies don't flee immediately from your tarrasque form, they deserve what they get. Chances are, after a couple rounds of taking such massive damage, they'll change their minds with astounding rapidity.

General Utility

Regeneration is a useful extraordinary ability. By shapechanging into a troll, you merely suffer subdual damage from most attacks.

If you know you'll be going up against a venomous creature, it's handy to remember that all demons and devils have an immunity to poison. Devils also have resistances to cold and acid; demons have the same, plus fire resistance. As an added bonus, assuming one of these forms allows you to retain at least a humanoid torso and vocal abilities, so further spellcasting is possible.

If your enemy is *invisible,* shapechanging into a pseudodragon grants you the ability to see invisibility out to 60 feet.

POLYMORPH ANY OBJECT

Attacking Enemies

One real advantage to the *polymorph any object* spell is that an object polymorphed into an animal eventually reverts to its original form. This allows you to create various types of "polymorph time bombs." For instance, imagine transforming a vial of poison into a suckling pig and presenting it as tribute to a ravenous beholder. Shortly after the beholder consumes its meal, the pig turns to poison in its stomach.

For those who don't like using poison, the above ploy works equally well with other objects. Instead of a vial of poison, you could use an unstoppered vat of acid or a 250-pound boulder with equally satisfying results.

Of course, the *polymorph any object* spell can be used to attack your enemy directly or indirectly. You could transform your foe into a block of wood and throw it onto a bonfire, or a statue of glass and hurl it from the top of a cliff. You could transform his favorite magic sword into a rot grub or polymorph his full plate armor into a black pudding or green slime. The possibilities are bound only by your imagination.

If you covet a magic item that belongs to someone else, you need merely employ the "magic sword to rot grub" scheme mentioned above. By polymorphing the object into something deadly, you can probably get your opponent to drop the item. At the very least, you're preventing him from using the item against you. All you have to do is await the eventual return of the deadly creature to its original form. If you have a divine spellcaster companion with access to a *dominate animal* spell, so much the better; use the deadly creature as an ally in the meantime.

Camouflage

You can also use *polymorph any object* in a kind of Trojan horse gambit. Imagine transforming your trusty homunculus into a carved statuette and presenting it to your rival. You can also have it take the form of a powerful-looking item that you wish to have identified by your wizardly foe. In any case, there are a number of ways to get a spy into your enemy's camp; you need simply wait until the effects of the spell wear off. When your homunculus resumes normal form, you can see through its eyes again, perhaps gaining enough information to *teleport* directly into your rival's stronghold!

Naturally, spying isn't the only way to employ this gambit. You might polymorph some fearsome creature into something innocuous and smuggle it into your rival's home. When it reverts to its original form, your enemy must deal with the monster. This need not be some combat-crazed creature that will devastate your enemy's guards and servitors; it might be something much more insidious.

Hiding Things in Plain View

Polymorph any object excels as a sneaky way to hide powerful magic items where they're not likely to be found. Assume the following: Due to overwhelming odds, it looks as if there's not much you can do to avoid capture by enemies. Since your imprisonment is pretty much guaranteed, you can make plans for your subsequent escape. One way to do this is to polymorph an item that will help you escape—a *helm of teleportation*, perhaps, or even your spellbook—into a tiny leech, then hide it on your body where it's likely to be unnoticed. After you're captured and stripped of obvious weapons and items, the leech fastened to your armpit reverts to the means of your escape.

Variations on this theme are also possible; the ploy is a good way to smuggle a weapon or magic item into an area where such objects are not permitted (like the evil high priest's inner sanctum), or to smuggle something out of an area undetected (like the queen sneaking a diadem out of the castle).

General Utility

Polymorph any object lets you move objects that would normally be impossible to budge. On a small scale, you could build a stone wall in a rock quarry, polymorph it into a snail, and carry it to the desired location. When the spell's duration expires, your new wall is in place.

This is also handy for transporting valuable objects out of dungeon locales. You know that solid gold statue that the DM put in the adventure as a "teaser," knowing full well that you couldn't possibly budge it out of the Underdark temple? Try polymorphing it into a turtle, then return to town using a *teleport without error* spell. Once the *polymorph any object* spell expires, you'll be wealthy beyond belief!

POLYMORPH OTHER

This is official errata from the Sage.

Transmutation
Level: Sor/Wiz 4
Components: V, S, M
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Target: One creature
Duration: Permanent
Saving Throw: Fortitude negates
Spell Resistance: Yes

Polymorph other changes the subject into another form of creature. The new form can range in size from Diminutive to one size larger than the subject's normal form, and can have no more hit dice than you have, or that the subject has, (whichever is greater), and in any case the assumed form cannot have more than 15 hit dice. You cannot change a subject into a construct, elemental, outsider, or undead unless it is already that type.

Upon changing, the subject regains lost hit points as if it rested for a day (though this healing does not restore temporary ability damage or provide other benefits of resting for a day; and changing back does not heal the creature further). If slain, the polymorphed creature reverts to its original form, though it remains dead.

The polymorphed creature acquires the physical and natural abilities of the creature it has been polymorphed into while retaining its own mind. Physical abilities include natural size and Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution scores. Natural abilities include natural armor, natural weapons (such as claws, bite, swoop and rake, and constriction; but not petrification, breath weapons, energy drain, energy effect, etc.), and similar gross physical qualities (presence or absence of wings, number of extremities, etc.). A body with extra limbs does not allow a character to make more attacks (or more advantageous two-weapon attacks) than normal. Natural abilities also include mundane movement capabilities, such as walking, swimming, and flight with wings, but not magical flight and other magical forms of travel, such as *blink, dimension door, phase door, plane shift, teleport, and teleport without error.* Extremely high speeds for certain creatures are the result of extraordinary or magical ability, so they are not granted by this spell. (In general, non-flying speeds greater than 60 and flying speeds greater that 120.) Other nonmagical abilities (such as an owl's low-light vision) are considered natural abilities and are retained.

Any part of the body or piece of equipment that is separated from the whole reverts to its original form.

The creature's new scores and faculties are average ones for the race or species into which it has been transformed. You cannot, for example, turn someone into a mighty weight lifter to give the subject great Strength. Likewise, you cannot change the subject into a bigger or more powerful version of a creature (or a smaller weaker version). Nor can you turn the subject into a variant form of the creature. For example, you can turn the subject into an ogre, but not a half-dragon ogre.

The subject retains its Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, level and class, hit points (despite any change in its Constitution score), alignment, base attack bonus, and base saves. (New Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution scores might affect final attack and save bonuses.) The subject retains its own type (for example, "humanoid"), extraordinary abilities, spells, and spell-like abilities, but not its supernatural abilities.

The subject does not gain the supernatural abilities (such as breath weapons and gaze attacks) or the extraordinary abilities of the new creature.

The subject can cast spells for which it has components. It needs a humanlike voice for verbal components and humanlike hands for somatic components. The subject does not gain the spell-like abilities of its new form.

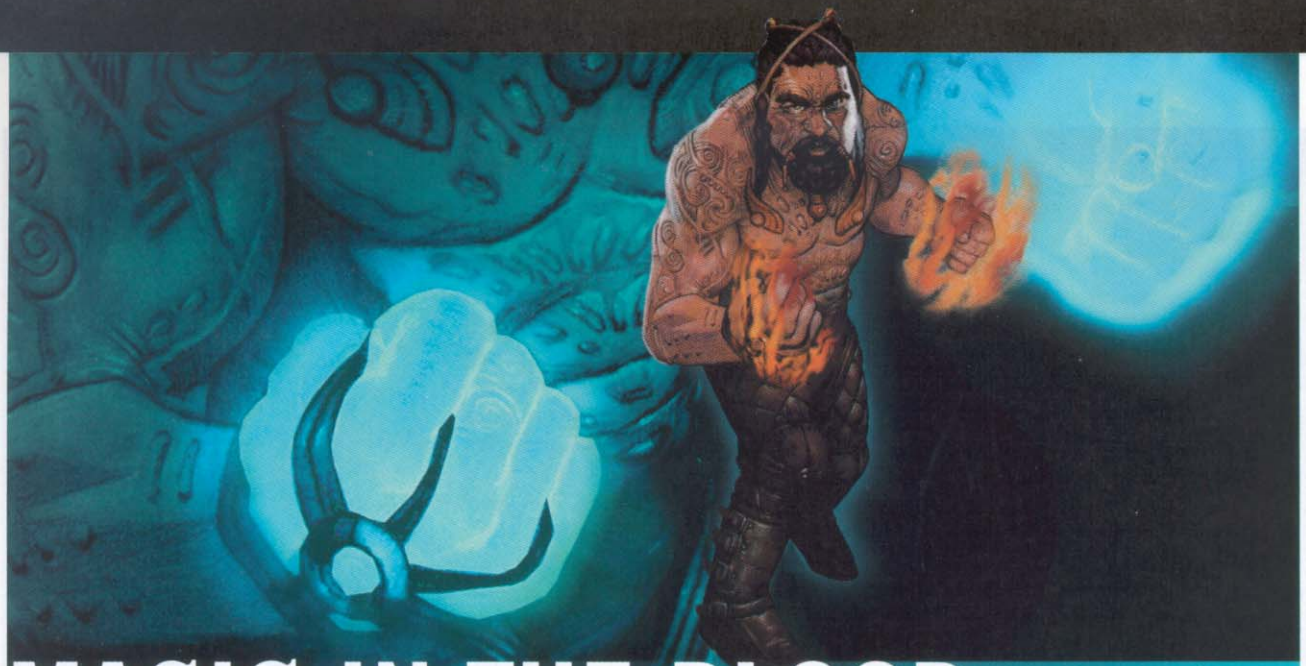
When the polymorph occurs, the creature's equipment, if any, transforms to match the new form. If the new form is a creature who does not use equipment (aberration, animal, beast, magical beast, construct, dragon, elemental, ooze, some outsiders, plant, some undead creatures, some shapechangers, or vermin), the equipment melds into the new form and becomes nonfunctional. Material components and focuses melded in this way cannot be used to cast spells. If the new form uses equipment (fey, giant, humanoid, some outsiders, many shapechangers, many undead creatures), the subject's equipment changes to match the new form and retains its properties.

You can freely designate the new form's minor physical qualities (such as hair color, hair texture, and skin color) within the normal ranges for a creature of that type. The new form's significant physical qualities (such as height, weight, and gender) are also under your control, but must fall within the norms for the new form's species. The subject can be changed into a member of its own species or even into itself. (If changed into itself, it does not suffer the abovementioned penalties from the disorientation of a new form.)

The subject is effectively disguised as an average member of the new form's race. If you use this spell to create a disguise, you get a +10 bonus on your Disguise check.

Incorporeal or gaseous forms cannot be assumed, and incorporeal or gaseous creatures are immune to being polymorphed. A natural shapeshifter (a lycanthrope, doppelganger, experienced druid, etc.) can take its natural form as a standard action.

Material Component: An empty cocoon.



MAGIC IN THE BLOOD

Sources of Sorcerous Power

by Geoffrey McVey • illustrated by Anthony Francisco

A bold young woman with eyes the color of old silver; a shy halfling who never seems to be quite where you expect him to be; a tattooed dwarf whose hands are ringed with flame; a reclusive half-orc with a haunted look. What do these characters have in common? They're sorcerers.

Sorcerers cast their spells without preparation or training, drawing on their inner strength and determination to bend the laws of the universe. They can be immensely appealing to players who want to try a new kind of magic. With sorcerers, however, comes the question that all Dungeon Masters must answer sooner or later: Where did they come from?

Whether starting a new campaign or converting a long-running game to the new rules, you'll want some sort of explanation for the appearance of sorcerers in the world. Have they been there all along, disguised as ordinary wizards? Has some subtle change in the magic of the universe started to produce them? Here are some possible answers for your campaign world.

When thinking about explanations for sorcery, start with the basics: Sorcerers gain their power not through study (Intelligence) or faith (Wisdom), but through force of personality (Charisma). This suggests that characters don't train to learn their spells as wizards and clerics do. "Charisma" comes from a Greek word meaning "a gift"; being a sorcerer is more like being the recipient of a gift than anything else. It is something that a person is either born with or stumbles upon, although there might be paths or techniques that one can follow to help along the way. Mentors can make the transition from an ordinary life to a life of sorcery easier, and they can help a sorcerer learn the more theoretical aspects of the class (skills and feats), but they cannot pass on their spells. A sorcerer's spells are personal and private expressions of her spirit.

Explaining the Gift

What can explain the existence of sorcerers, then? Perhaps it's something in their bloodline: a touch of magic inherited from an ancient romance with a creature with a fondness for mortals. Dragons sometimes take on humanoid form; dryads and nymphs steal the hearts of handsome woodsmen; and even some denizens of the outer planes have been known to linger in the world to court a special partner. The DM will want to make sure that these alliances took place far in the past. It's one thing to have a sorcerer claim that his power comes from a gold dragon ancestor, and quite another to have to deal with a player insisting that. "Of course great-grandfather would let me have something from his hoard. I'm family, aren't I?" A human sorcerer with a touch of dragon's (or dryad's, or deva's) blood is still a human—he gains no extra powers beyond the ability to cast sorcerous magic.

Sorcery might be a kind of magical accident, the result of exposure to an alchemical mishap or proximity to a potent artifact at a young age. If a character's parents were wizards, the exposure might even have taken place before her birth. Imagine a young gnome sitting down for a conversation with her mother and discovering that,

"You see, we were trying to clone your great-aunt Esme—a talented spellcrafter, you know—and, well, I don't think it went quite right. You do have her eyes, though." The advantage of this approach is that it makes each sorcerer unique and special. The process for becoming a sorcerer remains mysterious and (probably) irreproducible, and your players can come up with whatever strange and mysterious series of events they want to explain their origin.

If you plan to introduce sorcery slowly into your ongoing campaign, you can also make the difference between sorcerers and wizards a cultural one: On this side of the mountains, talented children study wizardry at the Onyx College, but foreigners who pluck magic from the air have begun appearing. Sorcery might have once been the dominant form of magic in your world, but after a magical catastrophe or a shifting of the planes it dwindled to almost nothing. Only now have the old ways started to become viable again, and sorcerers who remember those ancient secrets are discovering that their talents are growing. Characters who want to learn sorcery in this sort of setting might need to seek out mentors and convince them that they are worthy of the secrets of this lost magic. The process of becoming a sorcerer could be an adventure itself.

Playing the Part

Because sorcerers draw their power from Charisma, players should make their characters' magic an expression of their personality and style. An energetic and adventurous sorcerer should have spells that flash, sparkle, and are a visible manifestation of his nature. A character driven by anger might favor fiery destructive spells, while a brooding sorcerer might surround herself with mists and darkness. Another way to think of it is to make the character's magic the force that shapes his personality. An idealistic sorcerer who must learn practical spells for adventuring might grow increasingly pragmatic. If you are planning on playing a sorcerer, ask yourself what kind of person would have developed these magical powers, and why.

Because sorcerers usually have no reason to belong to an organization, they can look and dress as somberly or ostentatiously as they wish. If they have magical ancestry or are the product of magical experimentation, their uniqueness can be marked on their bodies in the form of strange birthmarks or exotic eyes and hair. As DM, you can even decide that all sorcerers share certain physical traits that make them distinctive. Your players might be pleased that the locals of one area immediately show the party's violet-eyed sorcerer respect, but when they cross the river to the village where such people are burned at the stake, they'll begin wishing he had added *change self* to his repertoire.

One technique for playing a sorcerer is to try to pass as a wizard or a bard. This works well for players who like to keep a few secrets up their sleeves. With sorcerers' high Charisma scores, they can excel at skills like Bluff and Disguise (and Perform for would-be bards).

Sorcerous Backgrounds

Here are some backgrounds for starting sorcerers to choose from. They provide ideas about the source of sorcerers' powers, suggestions for customizing skills and feats to suit their history, and tips on roleplaying this unique new class. None of these backgrounds is more or less powerful than any other, and they don't provide characters with new abilities—just a direction for selecting the abilities they have. In each case, remember: Let your sorcerer's personality be the guide for her spells, skills, feats, and appearance. Being a sorcerer is all about Charisma, and Charisma is all about style.

EXPERIMENTATION

Origin: Somewhere in the distant past, one of your ancestors took a shapechanged dragon as a lover, and ever since your family has shown touches of its power. The talent for sorcery is capricious and might disappear for several generations before manifesting itself in anyone, but when it appears, it's unmistakable. It might be recognizable through certain physical traits (eyes flecked with copper or scarlet, unusually long fingers and toes) or it might be more a matter of character. The dragon-touched sorcerer grows up with an unconscious awareness that he is greater than he appears, and this awareness seems to others like arrogance, precocious wisdom, or uncanniness.

Novice sorcerers of this kind are swept up with power too vast for their spirit to contain. They often show the first signs of their abilities through the uncontrolled casting of destructive spells together with emotional outbursts. As they grow and mature, they must learn to discipline themselves and keep their "inner dragon" under control. Good characters learn to make peace with their draconic blood and benefit from its ancient nobility. Evil characters either try to force their talent to obey them or revel in the untamed power of their ancestry.

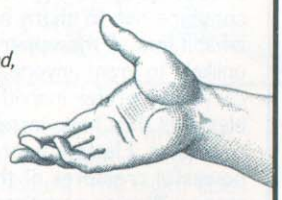
Races: Elves, with their long lifespans, have made good partners for dragons in the past. Humans have attracted the attention of dragons because they strive to live so fully in the relatively short time they spend in the world. Neither dwarves, gnomes, nor halflings have enough dealings with dragons for an ancestral relationship of this sort to be likely. Half-elves might inherit dragon blood through either parent, while half-orcs are likely to do so only through their human side.

Roleplaying: You have more power than you know how to control and are always looking for ways to "bleed off" excess energy. In your ordinary life, this takes the form of headstrong enthusiasm and a desire to rush in boldly and do what needs to be done as soon as possible. Although you might be an adult, the magic in you is still very young, and when you are carried away by it, you are prone to moments of childish rage or innocent wonder.

Feats: Iron Will or Toughness

Skills: Concentration, Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (history), Intimidate

Spells:
0-level—*daze, flare, mage hand, prestidigitation;*
1st—*cause fear, burning hands*



Tips: Choose your skills to reflect draconic knowledge and a majestic presence. Your family might have accumulated great lore from its time of contact with dragons, and you are the heir to it all. Your feats can begin as simple expressions of your natural indomitability, but at higher levels metamagic feats can help you mimic a dragon's ability to work magic without the gestures or incantations of ordinary mages. Your spells are signs of your grand heritage—choose those that are visible and dramatic, and use them freely.

FEY-TOUCHED

Origin: The magical creatures of the deep woods occasionally grow fond of mortals, and they sometimes share their gifts with those they favor. Their blessing might not appear immediately—they are long-lived and patient creatures, willing to wait generations for a child who shows promise. When the gift does appear, it could be a surprise. They might steal a child at birth to teach her magic and bring her back when she is half-grown, or slip unseen into a garden one summer's evening to whisper dreams into a sleeper's ears. Whatever they do, it is almost certain that they do not explain their reasons, nor linger long enough to be questioned by those they gift with magic.

Fey-touched sorcerers, particularly if they already have elven blood, are difficult to recognize. If they are more whimsical or more easily entranced by the natural world than the rest of their kin, who would say anything of it? Even when their magic first stirs, it's more likely to cause wonderment than harm, such as a cantrip that brings the scent of apple blossoms to a winter night rather than an accidental *shocking grasp.*

Races: Elves, gnomes, and halflings live close enough to the woodlands to attract the attention of fey creatures, so they are the best candidates for this background. Humans living in isolated villages might know a family whose young son disappeared into the forest and was never the same after he returned, but such occurrences are rare. Dwarves and half-orcs are, for better or worse, rarely the objects of fey attention.

Roleplaying: You have grown up surrounded by mystery, and now you use its power to work your magic. Your gifts are a blessing on you or your ancestors, and you guard them as carefully as the fey guard their own secrets. In your dealings with others, you are enigmatic, weaving your spells as quietly as possible to deflect attention from your intentions. You feel safest, though perhaps also loneliest, when you believe that no one around you realizes just what you are.

Skills: Hide, Move Silently, Perform, Bluff.

Feats: Dodge or Spell Focus (Illusion or Enchantment).

Spells: o-level—*dancing lights, daze, ghost sound, prestidigitation;* 1st—*change self, sleep.*

Tips: Pick skills, feats, and spells that cause distractions or otherwise let you avoid attention. When you reach higher levels, take the Silent Spell metamagic feat so that you can work your magic silently. Of all the sorcerers presented here, the fey-touched is probably the one most likely to take up a second class: What better way to keep your sorcerous abilities a secret than to act like a member of another class? With your Charisma, the ranger and bard classes are obvious choices for multiclassing, although you might find a druid's ties to nature appealing.

MAGICAL PACTS

Origin: In a world where magic is largely the province of clerics and wizards, there are always those who lack both the devotion and education to take up either profession. If they are still attracted to those realms of power, however, there are certain arcane bargains that can be struck with the inhabitants of other planes. The most difficult part of becoming a sorcerer by this method is contacting the entity that grants the power. A would-be sorcerer must generally find someone else who has already gone through the process and convince her to share her knowledge. Inhabitants of the upper planes are unlikely to grant anyone the power of sorcery; they prefer individuals to enjoy the blessings they have instead of begging for new ones. Elemental lords and certain powerful creatures of the lower planes are more willing to negotiate with mortals, but they often make demands of their new partners. An elemental might be content with a vow to honor its element, and to forswear the use of the one that opposes it.

Races: The beings who grant magical powers care little about individual races and so do not exclude any race from seeking a pact. Members of races noted for their ambition (humans, half-elves, and half-orcs) are more often the ones to try to gain power in this way.

Roleplaying: Two things are central to your personality: You sought out magic yourself and you had to surrender some of your freedom to attain it. These two can combine to make a character whose personality is tempered by either a new humility (if she has entered into a fair pact) or shame (if not). Your magic should always reflect something of your patron's nature. If you were given power by a djinni sultan, for example, use Air spells whenever possible.

Tips: Your skills and feats revolve around your endless quest for knowledge about outsiders and their ways, as well as a need to deal with outsiders on a regular basis. As you gain levels, concentrate on becoming an experton the subject of your patron. If your DM allows it, you might be able to justify learning certain skills and feats from your patron as well (a planetar might teach Martial Weapon Proficiency, for example, while an earth elemental could teach Endurance).

Skills: Concentration, Diplomacy Knowledge (arcana), Knowledge (the planes), Spellcraft.

Feats: Scribe Scroll or Skill Focus: Knowledge (arcana).

Spells: o-level—*arcane mark, detect magic, disrupt undead, read magic;* 1st—*protection fromchaos/evil/good/law* (as appropriate to your alignment), one spell appropriate to your patron (see below).

PATRON	SPELL	PATRON	SPELL
celestial	*magic weapon*	elemental	
demon	*chill touch*	air	*feather fall*
devil	*cause fear*	earth	*enlarge*
djinni	*obscuring mist*	fire	*burning hands*
efreeti	*endure elements*	water	*shield*
slaad	*summon monster I*		

Note: It's up to your DM to decide how stringent the requirements of your pact are, though they shouldn't be so restrictive that you no longer enjoy playing the character. It's up to you and the DM to settle on a single limitation, taboo, or obligation to begin with, and gradually add more as your character gains sorcerer levels (one every four or five levels is fair). Alternatively, follow the recommendations in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* (pp. 41-42) and accept one task each level instead of any ongoing requirements.

DRAGON ANCESTRY

Origin: Through occult experimentation, some individuals have voluntarily (but more often than not, accidentally) discovered ways of infusing their bodies with magical power. The process might be a long and arduous one with a carefully controlled diet of rare substances (powdered gems, exotic herbs, or the flesh of magical beasts) or the tattooing of charms onto one's skin. It might also have been an unrepeatable accident: the result of an apprentice who picked up a strange crystal in his master's study or recklessly mixed the wrong potions together. The result, however, is someone whose body and blood hum with new magic and who takes to her new abilities with intuitive ease.

A sorcerer who has gained magical powers through this method has been physically changed by the process. There might be an odd glow to her eyes when she casts her spells, her skin might be marked with arcane symbols, or she might give off the scent of rare flowers. If the source of a new sorcerer's abilities was an accident, the novice is likely still trying to adapt to the feeling of having magic at her fingertips, and she is equally liable to be either very cautious about casting spells or very reckless

Races: Humans and gnomes are the best suited for the sort of alchemical research that would produce sorcerers of this kind. Dwarven sorcerers are sometimes encountered whose power comes from elaborate runic tattoos; half-orcs have been known to scar themselves with similar markings to the same effect.

Roleplaying: Your magic sometimes makes you feel like an outsider in your own body, but you are growing accustomed to it. Experiment with your powers and with magic in general. Your grasp of spells is so intuitive and unconscious that sometimes you wish that you understood it better. If your gift is the result of an accident, consider how you have reacted to that fact. Do you enjoy your new condition or regret it?

Feats: Endurance or any of the following: Great Fortitude, Iron Will, or Lightning Reflexes

Spells: 0-level—*detect magic, detect poison, read magic, resistance;* 1st—*mage armor, shocking grasp.*

Skills: Alchemy, Craft (tattooing), Knowledge (arcana), Spellcraft

Tips: The skills listed above assume that your character has decided to make a career out of studying the kind of magical forces that gave her these powers. Another option would be to decide that you have only an intuitive understanding of magic and spend the rest of your time pursuing other interests. In that case, your skills could be entirely unrelated to sorcery. Choose feats that enhance your natural abilities (saving throws, initiative, or movement) to show that your magic is working in your body at all times. Likewise, try to pick spells that affect you personally, transforming or empowering your form and qualities.

FORGOTTEN CRAFTS

Origin: Outside the academies of wizards and their copied and recopied musty spellbooks, there are those who have learned magic in other ways. They might not fully understand the source of that power; those around them know only that the eldest daughter of the family down the road has always been gifted with strange powers, or that the rhymes muttered by the madman on top of a distant hill can knock crow from the sky. Some of these sorcerers might have started their careers with the intention of being wizards but stumbled on an entirely different way of channeling their abilities. Others might be the last in a long line of sorcerers from a tradition now long-forgotten, clinging to the old ways and confident in their effectiveness.

This sort of sorcerer can be difficult to spot, because he will generally do as much as possible to pass as an ordinary wizard. He might carry a "spellbook" of his own notes and meditations, consulting it regularly so as to preserve the secret of his form of magic. On the other hand, if he is part of an ancient tradition of sorcery, he might go out of his way to be visible as a way of reminding others that his school of magic is not dead. Pride in his own style of magic can often lead to clashes with "upstart" wizards or even other sorcerers.

Races: Any of the long-lived races (dwarves, elves, and gnomes) might have magical traditions stretching back longer than others can remember, as well as practitioners of the old ways who are still alive. The curiosity of humans can sometimes lead them to rediscover lost forms of magic, and their ambition can lead them to champion that form above all other kinds.

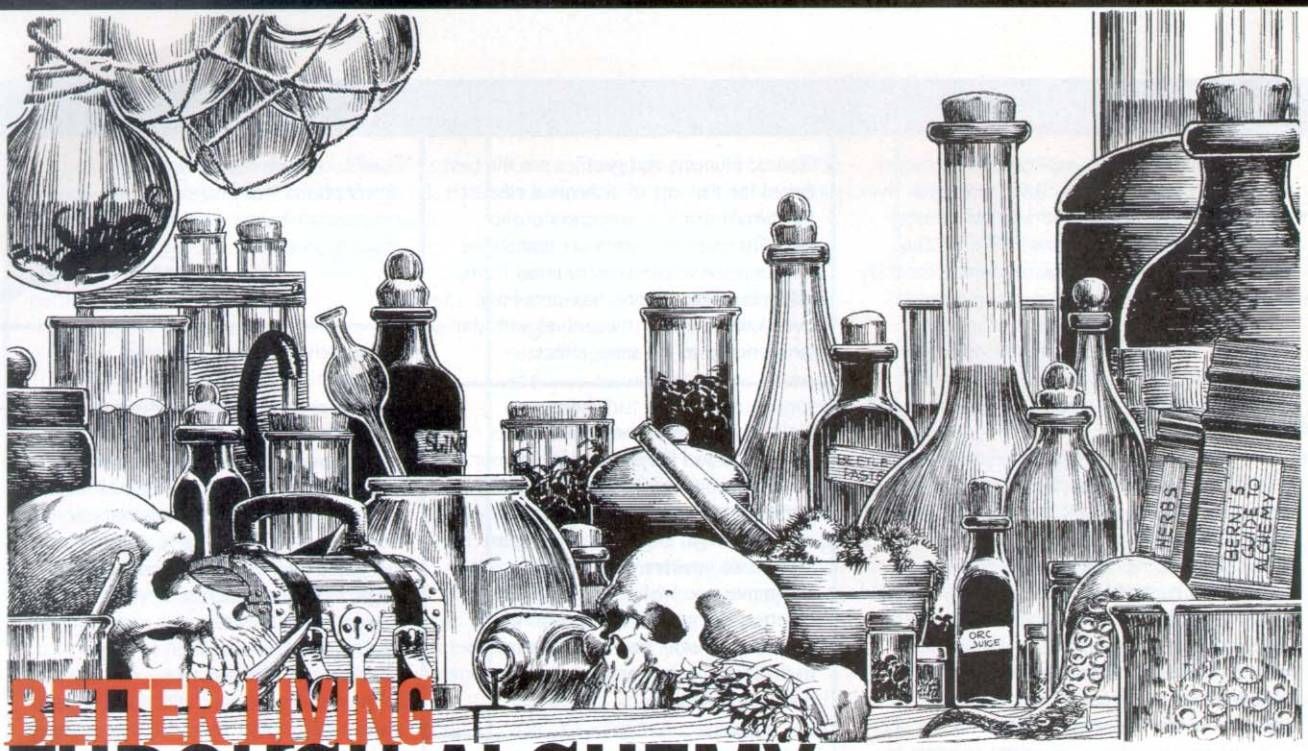
Roleplaying: Your way of magic is little known, but there is power in secrecy. If you are trying to hide the true source of your abilities, do your best to convince others that you are a wizard and dazzle them with esoteric terminology—or conceal your talents entirely. If you are part of an ancient tradition, then make sure everyone knows what it was and why it's better than modern styles of magic. Demonstrate your powers whenever you are able, and remind others of their value when they result in a victory.

Skills: Alchemy, Disguise, Knowledge (arcana), Spellcraft.

Feats: Scribe Scroll or Alertness

Spells: 0-level—*dancing lights, detect magic, mage hand, read magic;* 1st—*comprehend languages,* any one other spell.

Tips: The skills listed here are your best choices if you want your sorcerer to pass for a wizard. You might also want to think about the sort of practices that make your tradition unique and select a skill or two to emphasize that uniqueness. When selecting feats later in your career, concentrate on item creation feats. What better way to show the superiority of your craft than with an arsenal you have forged yourself? If knowledge of your tradition has been lost over the years, you might have learned an eclectic mix of old and new spells.



BETTER LIVING THROUGH ALCHEMY

by Jesse Decker and Stephen Kenson • illustrated by Brian Snōddy

Alchemy is special because it doesn't require the ability to cast arcane or divine spells—anyone can learn and use the Alchemy skill to exploit the fantastic properties of certain objects: plants, minerals, and creature parts, for example. That makes alchemy useful to all classes.

In addition to the information in the Player's Handbook, *the Alchemy skill is handy for a variety of things, including a potentially endless array of items useful to adventurers.*

ALCHEMICAL SKILLS

Alchemy is the skill of combining ingredients according to recipes to produce alchemical substances, but a true alchemist learns other skills useful to the science. These are most often Craft and Profession skills, like Craft (pottery making) or Craft (glassblowing) for creating the vessels, flasks, and other equipment used in alchemy.

A character with these skills can use them to make all the equipment that goes into an alchemist's lab as a normal use of a Craft skill (see the *Player's Handbook* for more details): Spend 167 gp for materials and make a skill check (DC 15) representing a week's work. If successful, multiply the check result by the DC (15). Add up your total each week. When it reaches 5,000, you've completed the lab. It usually takes several months to set up a complete alchemist's lab from scratch.

The Profession (herbalist), Knowledge (nature), and Wilderness Lore skills are also useful to alchemists. Most alchemists prefer to buy the herbal supplies they need to create items, but some DMs or players might want PCs to seek out the components of their creations themselves. Knowledge (nature) would allow someone to know what properties certain herbal components have and thus what to look for. Wilderness Lore would be useful for locating them. Profession (herbalist) would allow a PC to properly prepare the herb for alchemical use.

Some concoctions might require special ingredients, either according to their description or at the Dungeon Master's discretion. These might require special effort on the part of the alchemist. For example, a sunrod requires an iron rod and gold for the tip. Unless the alchemist is capable of mining and smelting the metals (usually more trouble than it's worth), he'll have to buy them from a smith. Likewise, fire beetle paste requires the glands of a fire beetle, so the alchemist must hunt one down or hire

adventurers to bring some back. Alchemists are often willing to pay handsomely for rare ingredients found by adventurers in their travels, and they sometimes hire adventurers to find some particular ingredient they need.

Identify Substance

A character can use Alchemy to identify the composition of a particular substance and what some of its chemical properties are. For example, it's possible to determine that a dagger blade is made from steel, silver, or mithral; that a sample of wine has been poisoned and what poison was used; if the stain on the carpet is blood or wine; or what magical potions are. The simple tests used for analysis do not harm the substance being tested and use up no more than a drop of the substance in question.

Dungeon Masters might allow alchemists to identify magic items other than potions, provided they have a chemical or alchemical nature that can be tested. For example, magical dusts (like *dust of disappearance*), candles (like a *candle of truth*), incense (like *incense of meditation*), pigments (like *Nolzur's marvelous pigments*), and so forth.

NEW ALCHEMICAL ITEMS

ALCHEMIST'S MERCY: A fine powder that, when mixed with water or fruit juice and consumed, eliminates the effects of a hangover.

ARMOR SOFT: This slippery red oil has a mild corrosive effect on most metals. Although long-term use of armor soft is detrimental to any suit of armor, it provides the short-term benefit of easier movement and less noise. Any suit of metal armor treated with armor soft has its armor check penalty reduced by one. The effects of armor soft last for 1 hour.

Each application of armor soft causes a cumulative 5% chance of the armor failing. The check is made after the duration of the armor soft has expired. Any armor that fails as a result of armor soft's corrosive effect is rendered useless.

Armor soft does not reduce the armor check penalty of non-metal armor, but the corrosive properties still apply.

COOLING GEL: This cold blue gel can be applied to the skin. It provides a +1 resistance bonus to fire- or heat-based attacks, or heals 1d6 points of burn damage that the character has suffered, provided it is applied within an hour of the damage.

COURIER'S INK: Courier's ink is a special, invisible ink that becomes visible only when dipped into a revealing solution. The efficient formula for the ink actually produces the revealing solution as a byproduct of the creation process, making the two relatively inexpensive. Courier's ink is common enough that blank pages found among captured documents are routinely dipped in a revealing solution to look for information hidden with the ink. Revealed courier's ink is always red, so most people with sensitive information to hide write or draw on a page first in a differently colored ink. This serves to draw suspicion away from pages treated with the special ink. Once the revealing solution is applied, messages written in courier's ink are permanently visible.

Courier's ink cannot be used to record a spell. Until it is dipped in the revealing solution, courier's ink is invisible. This makes drawing the precise symbols used in magic spells impossible.

FIREBANE: This thick grease provides rudimentary protection against one fire-based attack. To be effective, firebane must be smeared over the entire body. Anyone protected by the grease has fire resistance 10 while covered. The grease is only effective for half an hour. If left on the body for more than 1 hour, firebane begins to cause serious damage to the skin and deals 1 point of subdual damage per minute. Firebane can be washed off with water.

FIRE BEETLE PASTE: This noxious substance is a mixture of chemicals and a concentrated distillation of fire beetle glands, yielding a thick, reddish paste. It can be spread on surfaces and burns fiercely for 1d4 rounds when touched by open flame, doing 3d6 points of damage per round and halving the hardness of the object before damage is applied. It can burn through wood, stone, and even metal. One container of the paste is enough to draw a half-inch think line 1 yard long. A container can be ignited and thrown, but the paste does not stick or splatter when used in such a manner and has the same effect as a thrown torch.

FIRESTONE: This small orange stone can be hurled as a grenadelike weapon. When it hits a hard surface, it bursts into a puff of flame that does 1d6 points of fire damage and ignites any flammable materials within the 5-foot-square where it strikes. Fires lit by a firestone burn normally.

FLASH POWDER: This silky gray powder is a mild explosive. Flash powder burns too quickly to cause more than minor burns even in large quantities. What the powder lacks in explosive force, it makes up for in visual effect. Used occasionally in warfare as a diversionary tool, flash powder has become a mainstay of a burglar's equipment. The blinding light it produces often provides enough of a distraction for a skilled rogue to get out of danger. Even a small quantity of the powder burns brightly enough to cause those looking directly at it to suffer a -5 penalty to all Spot checks for the next 5 rounds. The flash also provides enough of a distraction to allow someone who was under observation to make a Hide check.

FREE FOOT: This quick-drying oil makes one 5-foot by 5-foot area exceptionally slippery. Creatures moving through the affected area must make a Dexterity check (DC 15) to keep their feet. Trying to stand requires a similar check as does moving out of the square once footing has been regained. Large or multilegged creatures only suffer the effects of free foot if all of their legs are in the covered area.

Free foot and tangle wire can make a fearsome improvised trap. If either check to move out of the square is failed, the victim cannot move out and is subjected to the effects of both substances again on the following round.

HOLDFAST: Since the tanglefoot bag's invention, scholars and adventurers alike have looked for more ways to use the powerful but short-lived adhesive. One of the most successful variations is holdfast, a small bundle of the same adhesive attached to the end of a rope. When the rope is thrown with enough force and accuracy, the bundle breaks, creating a temporary means of securing the rope to the surface it was thrown against. Quieter than a grappling hook and easy to transport, holdfast has become an item of choice for those who have to infiltrate a walled structure or cross a dangerous chasm.

To attach the rope to the desired target, the character must make a ranged attack. A holdfast container has a range increment of 10 feet. Armor Class mod-

ifiers for size apply. Thus a character trying to hit any point high on a 30-foot-tall wall must try to hit AC 0 (the desired area of the wall is Huge, but no Armor Class can fall below 0) with a -4 penalty to hit because of the range (three range increments). A character who wants to hit a spot within 1 foot beneath a 2-foot-wide window high on a 40-foot-tall wall would have to hit AC 2 (+2 size modifier to AC because the desired target area is Tiny) and the character would suffer a -6 penalty to hit because of the range. Any missed attack has a 50% chance of causing the holdfast bundle to break against another surface (use the rules for the deviation of grenadelike weapons to determine where the holdfast struck on such a failed throw). One bag of holdfast can support 200 pounds until the adhesive looses its effectiveness. Holdfast lasts 1d4+3 rounds before becoming too weak to hold the rope in place. Creatures struck by holdfast can pull off the sticky bag with a successful Strength check (DC 27) or cut the attached rope.

ICE CRYSTAL: When immersed in liquid, this small piece of rock crystal becomes as cold as a piece of ice and remains that way until it is removed from the liquid, whereupon it reverts to its normal temperature. Ice crystals are used to cool liquids in laboratories and keep drinks cold.

INSECT REPELLENT: This strong-smelling liquid can be applied to the skin to repel insects. It keeps Tiny or smaller insects at bay for 4 hours per application. Larger insects and those under the control of a spell must make a Will Save (DC 12) to approach a protected character. This benefit is lost if the character attacks the insect.

LIQUID ICE: This viscous liquid becomes extremely cold on exposure to air. A vial of liquid ice can freeze the surface of up to a 10-foot by 10-foot area of water or smother a like area of fire. Used as a grenadelike weapon, a vial of liquid ice inflicts 1d6 points of cold damage on a direct hit, or 1 point of splash damage.

NIGHT EYES: This thick grease, when applied to the naked eye, grants temporary low-light vision. The grease takes 1 full-round action to apply and lasts for 10 minutes. Torches and other faint light sources provide light normally for a character, but any source of bright light (like bright sunlight or the *daylight* spell) causes the night eyes user to suffer a -1 penalty to attack rolls.

POWDERED WATER: This fine white powder sparkles faintly. An ounce, mixed with a single drop of water, becomes a gallon of drinkable water. The powder is usually put in a vessel that can contain the full gallon of water before the drop of activating liquid is added. The vessel is then shaken to agitate the mixture. It takes a full round for the gallon of water to form.

The powder must be kept in a watertight container to remain effective, but it is an easy way to transport large amounts of water over great distances.

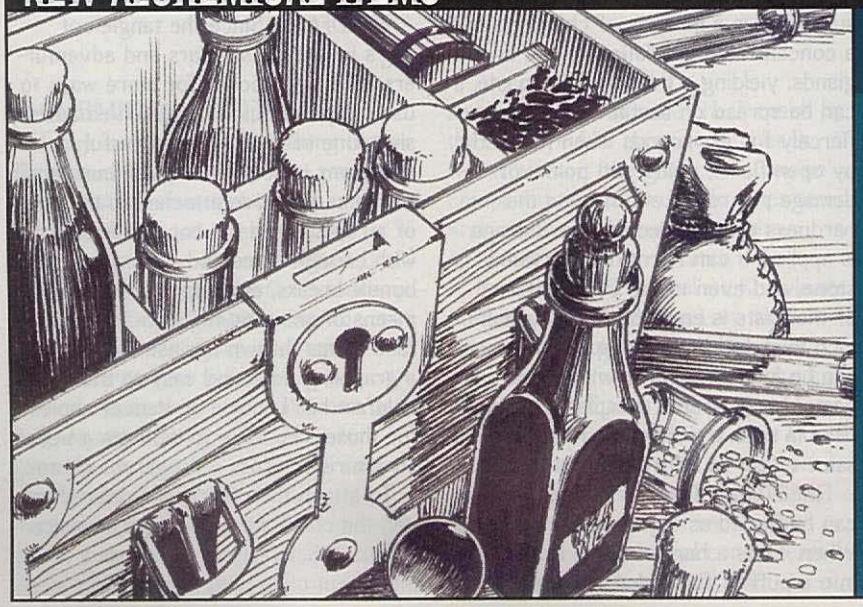
RED RAGER: This thick red salve must be spread over the entire body to be effective, but once applied, its effects are potent. Red rager grants its user a +2 bonus to her effective Strength for the next 10 minutes and a -4 penalty to Dexterity for 1 hour. Anyone who uses red rager regularly suffers deleterious side effects. Using red rager more than twice in a week's time forces the character to make a Fortitude save (DC 15) or suffer 1 point of permanent Charisma loss. Each failed save means that the powerful chemicals in red rager have affected the character's mind, raising her temper and coloring her skin slightly red.

SLIMEBANE: This concoction breaks down oozes of all types (see the *Monster Manual*). When used as a grenadelike ranged weapon, it does 1d6 points of damage on a successful hit and 1 point of splash damage. On the round following a direct hit, the Ooze must make a Fortitude Save (DC 15) or take an additional 1d6 damage. Slimebane does not affect creatures not of the ooze type.

SLIPPERY OIL: This oil provides a +5 bonus on Escape Artist checks for up to 1 hour or until removed with an alcohol-based liquid.

SNEEZING POWDER: This fine powder can be thrown as a grenadelike weapon. On a direct hit the target must make a Fortitude Save (DC 15) or else suffer a -2 circumstance penalty to all rolls for 1d4 rounds because of sneezing and watery eyes. Creatures immune

NEW ALCHEMICAL ITEMS



ITEM *Skill DC*	Cost
ALCHEMIST'S MERCY *Alchemy 10*	1 gp
ARMOR SOFT *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
COOLING GEL *Alchemy 20*	100 gp
COURIER'S INK *Alchemy 20*	20 gp
FIRE BEETLE PASTE *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
FIREBANE *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
FIRESTONE *Alchemy 25*	50 gp

to gases or poisons are immune to sneezing powder.

SOFTSHOE POWDER: Rubbing this powder on feet or footwear makes moving silently more easy. Applying softshoe powder provides a +2 competence bonus to Move Silently checks. Unless all of a creature's feet or footwear are treated, there is no benefit from the powder. The effects of the powder last for 10 minutes after its application.

SOUPSTONE: When dropped into a container of water, this small smooth stone turns the water into a hot, nourishing broth of a flavor chosen when the stone is made. A soupstone can transform up to 10 gallons of water before it becomes inert. It has no effect on water-based creatures like water elementals.

STONECLOTH: This heavy, gray cloth is woven from special mineral fibers. Making it requires the Craft (weaving) skill in addition to the Alchemy skill. The fire retardant cloth does not catch fire unless exposed to flame for more than a minute. Thus someone wearing stonecloth would suffer the initial damage from a fire attack, but would not suffer burning damage in later rounds, nor be forced to take an action to extinguish the fire.

TANGLE WIRE: Tangle wire, a thin barbed wire coated with a less-adhesive, longer-lasting form of the substance found in tanglefoot bags, is made in strands of up to 10 feet long. The adhesive makes tangle wire hard to transport and handle, but easy to string across a narrow opening and doubly effective against those who encounter it. Tangle wire comes wrapped in a tight bundle, and once unwound, it cannot be rewound and stored for later use.

To avoid tangle wire, a character must make a successful Spot check (DC 15). Those who fail this Spot check are caught by the tangle wire and take 1d2 points of damage per round unless they remain completely immobile, and they cannot move out of the 5-foot square containing the wire until they are free of its grip. Anyone caught by a tangle wire can make a Dexterity or Escape Artist check (DC 20) to escape or a Strength check (DC 15) to pull away. A victim with a slashing weapon can free himself as a full-round action. As long as the victim is willing to take the damage from the wire, he can act normally while caught.

TRAVELER'S SOLACE: This fiery, unpleasant liquid allows the user to temporarily circumvent the effects of fatigue and exhaustion for a short time. Fatigued or exhausted characters that drink a vial of traveler's solace can run and charge normally. Fatigued characters under the effects of traveler's solace suffer no penalties to their Strength or Dexterity, while exhausted characters suffer a -4 penalty to both ability scores. The beneficial effects of traveler's solace last for 1d4 hours, but the aftereffects last much longer. Exhausted characters who use traveler's solace to lessen the effects of exhaustion require a full 8 hours of rest before they become fatigued. Fatigued characters who have used traveler's solace require at least 8 hours of bed rest before they become fully rested. A vial of traveler's solace has no effect if another has been taken within 8 hours.

TRUTH WINE: This sweet white wine of elven origin loosens the tongue more effectively than other alcohol-based drinks. In addition to suffering the wine's normal intoxicating effects, those who drink truth wine must make a Will Save (DC 15) to tell a lie. The wine's effects are short-lived, lasting only 10 rounds -1 round per point of the drinker's Constitution bonus. (For example, a character with a +2 Constitution bonus would suffer truth wine's effects for 8 rounds.) Creatures must drink at least 1 glass (8 oz.) of truth wine to suffer its effects.

Elves are unaffected by truth wine.

VAPORS OF SLEEP: When applied to a cloth and held over the nose and mouth (or other breathing orifices), this liquid forces the target to make a Fortitude save (DC 13) or sleep as if affected by a *sleep* spell for 1d4 hours. The attacker must successfully grapple the target in order to use the vapors on her. A vial of the liquid can also be thrown as a grenadelike weapon. It does not cause victims to fall asleep, but they must make a Fortitude Save (DC 13) on a direct hit or suffer a -2 circumstance penalty on all actions due to drowsiness and disorientation for 1d4 rounds.

ITEM *Skill DC*	Cost
FLASH POWDER *Alchemy 20*	20 gp
FREE FOOT *Alchemy 25*	25 gp
HOLDFAST *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
ICE CRYSTAL *Alchemy 15*	5 gp
INSECT REPELLENT *Alchemy 15*	5 gp
LIQUID ICE *Alchemy 25*	30 gp
NIGHT EYES *Alchemy 25*	25 gp

ITEM *Skill DC*	Cost
POWDERED WATER *Alchemy 10*	5 sp
RED RAGER *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
SLIMEBANE *Alchemy 25*	15 gp
SLIPPERY OIL *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
SNEEZING POWDER *Alchemy 25*	60 gp
SOFTSHOE POWDER *Alchemy 25*	25 gp
SOUPSTONE *Alchemy 15*	300 gp

ITEM *Skill DC*	Cost
STONECLOTH* *Alchemy 25* *Craft (weaving) 20*	100 gp per square foot
TANGLE WIRE *Alchemy 25*	25 gp
TRAVELER'S SOLACE *Alchemy 25*	50 gp
TRUTH WINE *Alchemy 30*	75 gp
VAPORS OF SLEEP *Alchemy 25*	50 gp

** (two skills required)*

MASTERING CHANCE

Building a Dungeon with Random Tables

by Jonathan Tweet

As the Dungeon Master, you can combine random rolls with creative intent to populate your dungeons. For those DMs who don't use random encounters, the following tips show you how to develop and fine-tune encounters, no matter how you come up with them. This article uses "Dungeon of the Fire Opal" (from *Dungeon Magazine* #84) as an example, but you need not be familiar with that dungeon to use this article.

STARTING OUT

Think about what you already know before you've rolled the first die. You might start with a map, a theme, a legend, or a special encounter. Use this information as the context for interpreting random rolls. (It's okay to start with nothing at all.) The "Dungeon of the Fire Opal" started with the map in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the legend that a valuable fire opal was somewhere in the ruins, and a few room descriptions from the sample dungeon.

Next, randomly generate raw material (monsters, treasures, and features). Depending on how strong your vision for the dungeon already is, you'll use more or less random material. The "Dungeon of the Fire Opal," for example, has random creatures and treasures in the northern half only. Even there, the features aren't random, as the dungeon's identity as a former monastery provided plenty of ideas for features. Once you have the random results, adapt them to build a cool dungeon. It's the adjusting that puts your creativity to use.

Basically, you need to adjust encounters in two ways. For encounters rolled off lower- or higher-level tables, you need to adjust the power level. For every encounter, especially the more interesting ones, you need to make sense of them.

ADJUST ENCOUNTER LEVELS

You have several methods at your disposal to adjust the Encounter Level of higher- and lower-level encounters. You can also adjust encounters without altering the Encounter Level. Make the encounters tougher in one way but weaker in another, such as by changing 1d3 Medium-size monstrous scorpions to a single Large monstrous scorpion.

More or Fewer Creatures

Increase the number of monsters in a lower-level encounter, especially if doing so brings the number of monsters up to 2-4 (generally a good number of enemies for a fun fight). Decrease the number of monsters in a higher-level encounter if that lets you keep interesting high-level monsters. (See the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, p. 121 for dungeon encounter tables.)

In "Dungeon of the Fire Opal," 1d3 Medium-size monstrous spiders (a 2nd-level encounter) became 1d3+1 Medium-size monstrous spiders. Another encounter, 1d3+1 3rd-level NPCs (a 6th-level encounter), became a single 3rd-level NPC. The NPC turned out to be a tiefling wizard, so she ought to have been 2nd-level, but she stayed at 3rd level because a 3rd-level wizard is a much more interesting opponent than a 2nd-level one. The NPC encounter could have been 1d3+1 1st-level NPCs, but NPCs are hard enough to run that a small number of higher-level NPCs are usually a better encounter than a larger number of lower-level NPCs.

Bigger or Smaller Creatures

Make monsters individually tougher or weaker to fit the Encounter Level and the context of the encounter.

The 2nd-level encounter of 1d3 Large monstrous centipedes (2 Hit Dice each) becomes a 3rd-level encounter when they rise to 3 Hit Dice. The extra Hit Die increases a vermin's hit points, attack bonus, Reflex save, and Will save. Once you recalculate statistics for a bigger than average monster, keep them around so you can use them again.

The 5th-level encounter with 1d3+1 Huge skeletons was tough to adjust. During the first playtest, it was 1d2 Huge skeletons: a 3rd-level encounter. Specifically, it was a single skeleton of an evil cloud giant.

The idea of multiple skeleton guardians, however, fit a particular corridor in the dungeon, where there were several small guardrooms for the skeletons to occupy. During the second playtest, therefore, the encounter was three Huge skeletons, each of which was damaged to about ⅓ its normal hit points. (A creature with ⅓ hit points is about half as tough as normal.) That worked pretty well, but it was still strange to have such tremendously big creatures in the dungeon.

USING RANDOM TABLES

Rolling up random monsters and treasures for a dungeon is practically a game in itself. In some sense, you're exploring the dungeon. The players will explore it later, but you're the one who gets the first look. The surprises that the dice come up with become your secrets, which you share later with your players. To a lesser extent, rolling the monsters' hit points and even ability scores is more of the same: finding out what's in the dungeon.

Using random tables gives you plausible deniability. If an encounter is "too tough" or a treasure "too piddling," the players know that it's just the equivalent of getting a string of bad rolls in combat. It's not your fault. If an encounter is "too weak" or a treasure "too rich," the players feel lucky, and you don't get a reputation as a pushover. If an encounter is based on random rolls, the players can't analyze encounters based on what they think you'd invent to be fair. If they kill a dragon and get no treasure, they don't search endlessly for hidden treasure, thinking, "The DM would never short us on treasure for this encounter."

Rolling up a dungeon is like a game of solitaire: you start with something random and give it order. Unlike solitaire, dungeon building is better if you cheat.

INDIVIDUALIZING CREATURES

You can individualize your creatures' hit points, ability scores, and other details as much or as little as you want.

AVERAGE CREATURES: The easiest thing to do is to assume that the creatures have typical ability scores, average hit points, typical gear, and so on. Especially for encounters with large numbers of monsters, this is fast and easy.

ROLLED HIT POINTS: Rolling hit points for each creature prevents players from tracking damage to monsters and accurately guessing how many hit points each one has left. Such bean counting, while it can help the players make smart tactical decisions, distracts players from the thrill of combat. If each monster has random hit points, it's less useful for players to track the damage they've done and so they're less likely to do so.

ROLLED ABILITY SCORES: Usually, rolling ability scores just isn't worth it. For most monsters, rolling the ability scores means you can't use the statistics in the *Monster Manual*, so preparing for the battle takes longer. If you have worked up the statistics for a unique monster, however, it's no harder to run a monster with random abilities than it is one with average abilities. The fiendish red wyrmling, for example, can't be run out of the *Monster Manual*, so it has random ability scores.

Finally, the encounter became three Large skeletons, which fit the scale and layout of the dungeon pretty well.

Set an Ambush

For a low-level encounter with cunning creatures, consider having the creatures ambush the PCs. "Fire Opal's" random 2nd-level encounter with 1d3 ghouls became 1d3 ghouls lying in ambush. It's hard to say exactly how much tougher an encounter is based on the monsters striking from ambush, but the encounter proved about right in the playtest. In this specific case, the ambush involved a shrieker (another random encounter). The XP awarded for the shrieker represented the added danger of the ambush encounter, so the PCs got only standard XP for the ghouls. (You wouldn't want to give the PCs XP for both the shrieker and the ambush, since the shrieker only presented a threat because it was a signal for the ambush to begin.)

Creatures with Class Levels

For lower-level creatures that advance by class level, consider adding class levels to one or more of them to bring the Encounter Level up. The 2nd-level encounter with 1d3 lizardfolk became 1d3 lizardfolk that included a single lizardfolk with a level of druid (the leader).

Creatures with Templates

Perhaps the most fun way to increase an Encounter Level is to layer a template from the back of the *Monster Manual* onto a monster. The 1st-level encounter with one dragon became an encounter with one fiendish dragon. The dice came up "red wyrmling," which actually put the encounter over EL 3. (Even the smallest red dragon is CR 3 before you add the fiendish template.)

MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

If you're tight on time, you can roll all your random encounters room by room and let the dice fall where they may. Usually, however, it's worth the time to make sense of the random encounters, place them by choice, and adjust them as necessary to fit your scheme.

Flavor

Give some of the encounters and treasures a link to the history or theme of the dungeon, or to the world beyond. An allip, for example, was the ghostly remains of a lawful monk who had been driven insane by an abyssal paradox. A hidden treasure also became a link to the fallen monastery's past—it was the single potion left over in the monastery's special storage chamber. The imps' hoard of copper pieces was the contents of forty stolen almsboxes, still filled with the alms that charitable people had donated for the poor. The Large skeleton guardians became osyluth skeletons.

Monster Allies

Often, links among the encounters suggest themselves, and you can cast the monsters as groups. It's especially nice if you can relate the most powerful and interesting creatures to each other. Be careful when you do so. Figure out how likely the monsters are to defend each other and present a united front against the PCs. Four EL 3 encounters that all gang up on a 3rd-level party is very dangerous.

In the "Dungeon of the Fire Opal," the fiendish wyrmling, tiefling wizard, two imps, and the lizardfolk fit together nicely. The *Monster Manual* says that imps often work with lawful evil spellcasters, so the tiefling became lawful evil. The imps were trying to win the fiendish red wyrmling over to them, paying the lizardfolk (who speak Draconic) to be the "dragon tenders." These four encounters went into a set of rooms all connected to each other through two large, central rooms. The tiefling got the room with a secret door to use as an escape route (which came in handy during playtesting).

Paths of Travel

If possible, keep paths of travel open. If creatures can get to food and water (or food can get to them), the dungeon makes more sense. For example, the monstrous spiders went in a dead end room that had an unobstructed path to the surface. Since animals could wander into the area from the surface (without having to open doors), it was plausible that the spiders could survive there. Since it was a dead end room, the spiders' web spanning the corridor didn't prevent other denizens from getting to and from the surface.

On the other hand, the monstrous centipede was trapped in a dead end room with the door shut. (One of the imps had shut it inside to make the dungeon more livable for the wizard.)

Sequence

Put encounters that the party should face early near the entrance to the dungeon. Put those they should face late farther away. For example, the phantom fungus in "Dungeon of the Fire Opal" is near the entrance. A battle with the invisible fungus gives the players some experience with fighting invisible creatures and the DM some experience handling such a fight. That way, when they face the imps deeper in the dungeon, everyone at the table is ready to handle that tricky encounter more easily.

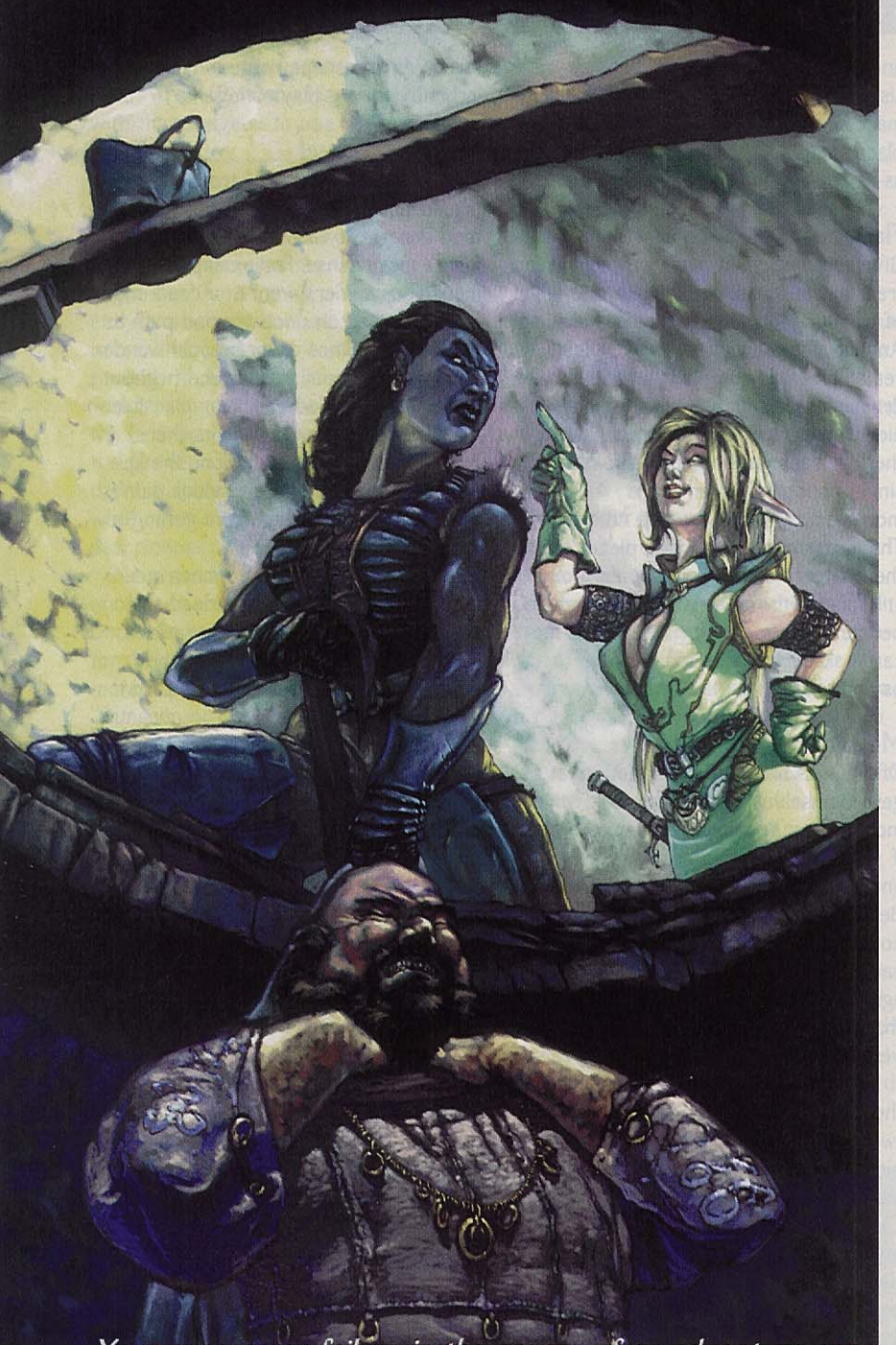
The End Result

After you've put this amount of thought and development into your random dungeon, it's hardly random any more. The raw material comes from the tables in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, but you've got to put it together in a way that reflects your style and plans. After that's done, all you need is a party of adventurers to explore what you have prepared.

JUST THE FACTS, MAGE

The Fine Art of Gentle Persuasion

by Robin D. Laws • illustrated by Anthony Waters



Your success or failure in the course of an adventure can depend on your ability to wring information from NPCs. Although this is especially true in scenarios with major investigative sequences, even the simplest adventure might require you to talk to dungeon inhabitants.

The key to an interview encounter is understanding the NPC's intentions. To figure out what potential informants want, you must learn to read NPC behavior and sift clues from their environments. Does the informant mean to deceive you? Is he well-meaning but misinformed? Is he just too busy to talk right now? For most informants, simple observation is enough to figure out the motivations behind an NPC's refusal to provide the information you seek. Study his behavior for cues that reveal his state of mind. Observe his surroundings for indications of his station in life. Ask yourself what the typical problems of this sort of person might be. Think about what he most wants to protect. Listen to the way he evades your questions. He might come right out and tell you why he's holding back, or he might put you off with lies that inadvertently reveal his motivations.

Once you've identified the NPC as belonging to a particular type, you can tailor your information-gathering strategy to best deal with him.

Types of Informants

Informants are minor characters. Most appear for only a scene or two. Your DM isn't going to lavish an enormous amount of attention in creating them. She is likely to rely on stock character types. They're simple and easily recognizable right off the bat.

From your point of view, the most important thing about any informant is his reason for withholding information from you. We've grouped characters according to their motivations. For each, we list a number of likely problems the character suffers, a list of behavioral cues and environmental clues you might use to identify their motivations, and various strategies for overcoming their resistance.

Fear

Problem: The informant, or people important to him, might be harmed if he reveals what he knows.

Behavioral Cues: He tells you he's afraid, or he's so afraid of reprisals that he won't even admit it. He looks around constantly to see who might be listening. He won't be seen in public with you and

perspires profusely. He talks and moves quickly, as if trying to get rid of you as soon as he can.

Environmental Clues: His house or possessions have been vandalized. He's bruised or cut, as if he's been recently beaten up. The people around him also show the behavioral cues of fear.

Suggested Strategies: Demonstrate your ability to protect him. Stoke his anger until his desire to avenge himself against his tormentors eclipses his terror. Appeal to his sense of justice, arguing that he owes it to the community to speak out and help put a stop to evil. Make him worry about his reputation by threatening to inform others of his cowardice.

Loyalty

Problem: Your mission will harm others to whom the NPC owes her loyalty. She must risk their displeasure to aid your cause.

Behavioral Cues: She speaks defiantly and stands with her chin out, as if daring you to take a poke at her. She scoffs at your cause or tries to convert you to hers. She lists all of the terrible things she'd sooner endure than be branded a traitor to her friends.

Environmental Clues: The informant wears the uniform or insignia of your adversaries. She's well-clothed and well-fed in a place where all but loyal minions of your opponent live in poverty. She's armed, armored, or otherwise ready for a fight.

Suggested Strategies: Break her will through coercion. Assure her that no one will learn of her betrayal. Persuade her that her boss would betray her if given half a reason to, or that the people she is loyal to aren't what they are cracked up to be.

Distrust of Authority

Problem: He has reason to fear law enforcement or the local government. If the regime is just, he's a criminal with misdeeds to conceal. If the ruler is a tyrant, he fears unjust persecution. He might be a true threat to the powers that be or a non-entity governed by irrational dread.

Behavioral Cues: He accuses you of being one of the queen's men. He won't meet openly with you—or he won't meet you in his usual haunts, insisting on neutral ground. Before entering an area, he always searches it for pursuers. He starts whenever he hears a strange noise, certain that he's being spied upon. He flees when you make a sudden move.

Environmental Clues: The informant is armed, including partially concealed weapons. If he's a fugitive, he wears nondescript garb to avoid unwanted attention. If he's an active criminal, he might wear an outfit meant to make himself look intimidating.

Suggested Strategies: Convince him that you don't represent the regime nor care about his crimes. Threaten him with exposure to the authorities if he doesn't cooperate. Make him fear you more than he does the queen's men.

Greed

Problem: She wants or needs money. If already rich, she can't stop thinking about ways to increase her wealth; she might act compulsively, as if worried that her fortune might vanish overnight. Alternatively, she might just be an average citizen figuring to make a few silver pieces on the side.

Behavioral Cues: She says things like, "What's in it for me?" or "I think I might have seen him, but my eyesight isn't what it used to be." When you give her money, she says, "That's helping my eyesight some, but it hasn't cleared up completely; you follow me?"

Environmental Clues: She might not show any outward signs of greed. She could appear as a scruffy, threadbare sort in obvious need of coin for her next meal or drink. Alternatively, she could wear the rich—but somewhat worn and carefully maintained—garb of a miser.

Suggested Strategies: Pay her. Haggle aggressively, but don't forget how much the information is worth to you. Conceal its importance from her, or it will cost you more. Expect her to squeeze you for as much as she can.

Superstition

Problem: He irrationally fears curses, visitations by monsters, or other supernatural misfortunes. (In a D&D world, it's entirely possible that these threats are real: if so, see the entry for fear.)

Behavioral Cues: He fidgets or squints into space as if expecting to see ghosts. He starts at sudden noises. He inquires after your wounds or scars, asking which eldritch spirit inflicted them on you. He believes himself cursed and exhibits off-putting symptoms such as itching or uncontrolled blinking. He avoids black cats, won't step on cracks, and stays far away from ladders.

Environmental Clues: He suffers from a genuine affliction (like blindness, a withered limb, or bad skin) that he blames on the action of some sort of extraplanar entities. The informant's neck bends from the weight of luck charms strung around his neck. His house or workplace is covered in chalk sigils to ward off evil spirits.

Suggested Strategies: Assure him that your magic is more powerful than those of his enemies. Give him a lucky talisman to protect him from supernatural forces. Threaten to curse him if he doesn't obey you. Whatever you do, don't try to convince him that his fears are unwarranted. You'll waste time arguing.

RESEARCH

If you have a good idea that a particular NPC is likely to hold information vital to your investigation, you might want to ask around about him before confronting him. Find out what his problems are; they might explain his resistance. For example, the drunkard's problem is that he's ruined his mind and body through decades of alcohol abuse. If you asked around about him, the locals would tell you about this. You'd then realize you need to listen carefully to his ravings for the occasional nugget of sense.

Don't expect research to provide useful information on every subject. If the informant hides his problems, your snooping will be for naught. If the knowledge you seek doesn't much matter to the informant, your knowing his problems might make him suspicious or annoy him. If you research every informant, you'll get sidetracked. If you're not careful, you'll spend more time on the subsidiary investigations than on the object of your inquiries. Research only the most important informants.

Let's say you seek a gang of masked bandits. You learn that a rug merchant saw them riding away from the library late last night. The shopkeeper's main problem in life is that his suppliers have started favoring his competitor. He doesn't want to answer your question about the gang because he's preoccupied with business concerns. If you confront him with your knowledge of this problem, he might get offended or concerned that he's the subject of gossip. If, on the other hand, you can subtly offer him help with his problem in return for his cooperation, he might give you the description you seek.

PERSUASION

Some informants react only to positive approaches. You must offer them something they want in exchange for their cooperation. Others don't want anything from you but your hasty exit from their lives. These types might call for tough tactics on your part. You must threaten them with a bad result if they don't help you. If you know an NPC's problems, you can threaten to make them worse. Otherwise, you'll have to rely on general intimidation, from threats to reveal damaging information to outright physical harm.

Your DM will probably set up the encounters so that you don't have to do anything blatantly unsympathetic in order to achieve a heroic end. The NPCs who respond only to bad treatment, then, will generally be the ones who seem to deserve it. It's no fun having to threaten a kindly grandmother by holding her beloved pet dog over a well. It is fun to smash up a tavern run by a contemptible crook who bought the place with the proceeds of crime. The character's likability therefore provides you a clue as to the right approach to take with her. Sometimes the DM will throw you a curve by giving a villainous character a good reputation. If she does so, though, she'll place clues in the scene to alert clever players to the NPC's true nature.

If you know in advance how the informant typically responds to certain situations, so much the better. If you know that she's easily offended, you'll likely want to take a friendly approach. If she's notorious as a bully who respects only people bigger than herself, prepare to deliver a good thrashing.

Prejudice Against Adventurers

Problem: An adventurer once did something bad to her, or she has formed a negative opinion of adventurers from tales heard second-hand.

Behavioral Cues: She keeps her distance from you while talking. If you move toward her, she moves back. She keeps her arms folded across her chest. She speaks to you as little as possible. She tries to cut off the conversation and get back to her business. If she's a little heedless of her own safety or feels well protected, she might tell you just what she thinks of your kind. She might regale you with the story of the terrible event that forever convinced her that all adventurers are black-hearted scum.

Environmental Clues: None. The informant can come from any social station. Her dislike of dungeon-crawlers isn't a major factor in her everyday life. She thinks about it only when people like you blithely call on her for help.

Suggested Strategies: Agree that most adventurers are unworthy wretches; then convince her that you're the exception to the rule. Affirm her fears by threatening to do much worse to her than the stories about adventurers would suggest.

Personal Animosity

Problem: The informant knows and hates you. He wants you to fail at anything you attempt.

Behavioral Cues: You've had run-ins with him in the past and remember exactly why he has a grudge against you. When you ask him for help, he says things like, "I wouldn't spit on you if you were on fire." The tougher your situation, the more pleasure he takes in it.

Environmental Clues: He might bear scars from a duel you once fought. He's painted an insulting picture of you and hung it in a prominent place in his home—his dart board, for example. If you robbed him, he's now poor. If you cheated him in a business arrangement, he now operates out of a hovel. If you mocked him, townsfolk giggle at him as they pass by.

Suggested Strategies: Grovel and abase yourself. Offer him something that you clearly can't afford to part with, so he feels he's finally getting his revenge against you. Settle his original claim against you. Threaten to do something to him that makes the reason for his grudge seem minor in comparison.

Disinterest

Problem: Helping you would entail effort or inconvenience. The informant doesn't want to be bothered. Don't take it personally; she just doesn't believe in helping anybody.

Behavioral Cues: She shrugs frequently, doesn't make eye contact, puts on a great show of being bored, and says things like, "I'll send you a message when I start to care." She sits or stands lazily, leaning against a wall or lolling in a chair. She yawns while you talk and generally acts like she just woke up from a long nap.

Environmental Clues: Her appearance is careless. If you encounter her in her dwelling, it's in a state of disarray—or in the process of being cleaned up by a spouse, relative, or servant.

Suggested Strategies: Threaten her with the prospect of having to work. Make it clear that she'll get no rest until she tells you what you want to know. Convince her that her cozy situation won't continue if your enemies get their way.

Preoccupation

Problem: The informant's own concerns require his immediate attention. He might have a business to run, studies to complete, military duties to fulfill, or religious obligations. He might be another adventurer who can't devote time to anything other than his own mission. He doesn't even really have time to explain why he can't help you.

Behavioral Cues: He's doing something while you try to talk to him and won't take the time to look directly at you. He's heading somewhere fast; you have to walk quickly to keep up. His expression is harried and he complains about the urgency and difficulty of his task. He's only half-listening to what you say.

Environmental Clues: The informant runs around in a busy workplace bustling with activity. He's surrounded by companions as frenzied as he is. Assistants interrupt your conversation to tell him of freshly-brewing crises.

Suggested Strategies: Promise to help him advance his own cause, saving him time. Convince him that his agenda is meaningless if your foes win. Threaten to disrupt his activities, putting him even further behind schedule.

Confusion

Problem: The informant sincerely wishes to help you but requires coaching before she can provide the answer you seek. She might be confused or not enough of an expert in the matter at hand to understand what she saw. Her senses might have been affected during the incident, deranged by drink or the effects of magic. She might be delusional, interpreting events according to a bizarre private mythology.

Behavioral Cues: The witness spends more time telling you how much she wants to help and how important it is that you succeed than supplying the information you need. She speaks haltingly, stopping in mid-sentence to correct herself. When pressed for details, she gets flustered or changes her

story. She gives you an answer, but it's so completely at odds with what you know already that it makes no real sense. She asks you for background information so she can give you the answers she thinks you want to hear—which aren't necessarily the right ones. If you ask her leading questions, she always accepts the premise of your query, valid or not.

Environmental Clues: Foul breath, disheveled clothing, and prematurely weathered features suggest a lifelong drunkard. A glassy-eyed expression and monotonous voice indicate a victim of mind-control spells. If the witness lives out in the rough, she might be a crazed hermit.

Ordinary citizens can be confused witnesses too, because of flawed perceptions or inaccurate memory. Their environment offers no evidence of their unreliability.

Suggested Strategies: Listen carefully to the witness's account. Walk through each statement, trying to get more detail. Test the character with leading questions to see if she agrees to everything. Question improbable details. Make it clear that you'll respect her even if she honestly doesn't know the answer to your queries. If her perceptions were clearly off, listen carefully to the account anyway, treating it as a puzzle to be deciphered.

Mischief

Problem: The informant hasn't gotten a good laugh lately and aims to rectify that by making you the butt of a practical joke. Just for the fun of it, he'll pretend to cooperate while giving you incorrect information. In a few cases, the prankster might have a grudge against you. Sometimes, he'll have been put up to the task by your rivals or enemies.

Behavioral Cues: Infatuated by the sound of his own voice, he uses lots of big words. A note of amusement creeps into his voice. He maintains a light manner even while discussing a tragedy or emergency. He tries to draw you in with gestures of friendship, putting his arm on your shoulder or giving you a jovial slap on the back. He offers you food or drink. He draws out the conversation as long as he can to better savor the joke. Once you've taken his information to heart and gone on your way, you see him following you—he's waiting to see you look foolish.

Environmental Clues: Jokesters of this sort are often layabouts. They might be restless sons of the idle rich, in which case they'll be flamboyantly decked out in exaggerated versions of the latest fashions. Alternatively, they might be actors, storytellers, troubadours, or other itinerants of low character. Street urchins are notorious mischief-makers.

Suggested Strategies: Look gift horses in the mouth. Ask yourself why your witness seems to be having so much fun talking to you. Examine his account for improbabilities or inconsistencies. Make sure that he could actually possess the knowledge he claims.

Let him know that you're a poor sport. Casually mention the number of broken bones suffered by the last person to trick you.

Malice

Problem: Although unacquainted with you personally, the informant sees you as someone who ought to come to harm, or at least have her intentions thwarted. If she's evil, she wants to see good characters fail. If she's chaotic, she wants to frustrate the minions of order.

Behavioral Cues: If you're conducting the investigation in a place where chaotic or evil individuals are free to boast of their allegiances, she'll sneer at you and refuse to help. If she's operating in an area where her kind must keep their behavior under wraps, she'll do her best to seem like a regular citizen.

Clever deceivers might pose as one of the other types of reluctant informants listed here. They don't want to seem too anxious to please lest you treat their accounts with the suspicion they deserve. Instead, they'll make a show of overcoming their reluctance before feeding you false information.

Less accomplished liars might exhibit the cues of mischief-makers, above.

Environmental Clues: If you're far from civilization, the informant might be an orc chieftain holding sway over a bandit encampment or a leprous cultist of some forbidden god, clad in burlap robes and reeking of foul incense. In civilized lands, she might look like a criminal or some other shady character. More effective servants of evil can adopt guises from all walks of life.

Suggested Strategies: Physical force provides a time-honored method of dealing with openly malicious characters. Forget bribery; this type of false informant is more dedicated to his cause than his own self-interest.

Deceitful informants tell tales calculated to get you into as much trouble as they can. Be suspicious of information that requires you to confront dangers that seem unrelated to your mission.

Complicity

Problem: The informant serves the enemy your mission is meant to defeat. He wants to divert you from your goal and toward your doom.

Behavioral Cues: Life would be great if enemies were easy to identify. An agent sent by your foe is likely to be an experienced liar or someone you trust.

Environmental Clues: See Malice.

Suggested Strategies: Be suspicious of statements by witnesses who seem too cooperative and too well-prepared. Liars often hook their victims by telling them what they want to believe, so be wary of information that sounds too good to be true.

Getting tricked can sometimes work to your benefit. If you discover that you've been led into a trap or otherwise deceived, you now know the identity of one of your enemy's allies. Capture and interrogate him. If you can crack his resolve (see Loyalty), you'll usually find he has information that can take you to the next step in your investigation.

If you're looking for a model to help you brush up on your interrogative technique, check out the long-running TV show *Law & Order*. Granted, it's lacking in mighty-thewed barbarians and fire-breathing dragons, but since its plots advance rapidly with little emphasis on the protagonist's personal lives, its portrayal of investigations is as pure and concentrated as you're going to get. During the first half of each show, the two featured police detectives encounter a wide range of different informants. Some are cooperative, but most offer resistance to the detectives' efforts to elicit information. In each of these scenes, the cops figure out what makes the witness tick, and then either cajole or threaten until he coughs up a relevant clue. That piece of information leads to another witness, who the detectives must in turn figure out and persuade. If your DM runs investigative scenarios with any regularity, you owe it to your XP total to study some *Law & Order* episodes for the tips they offer.

A LITTLE MORE FAMILIAR

A Sorcerer's Best Friend

by Stephen Kenson • illustrated by David Day

The Company of Five chose a table far from the others as they discussed raiding the fortress of the Wizard of the Black Oaks. Only a scruffy tavern dog lay nearby, curled up before the hearth.

"The wizard lives alone," Glamring said. "Shunning the company of others."

"Save, perhaps, for the creatures of the Black Forest," said Meela. "It is said the wizard has many familiars at his command."

"Bah, simple beasts," Kronig said with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I've hunted far worse in the frozen north. Whatever menagerie this wizard commands, it will be no match for us."

The companions talked well into the night. None of them thought anything of it when the hound beside the fire stretched and trotted out into the darkened streets, breaking into a run at the edge of town. My master will be most interested in this, *the familiar thought, as the distant trees of the Black Forest beckoned him home.*

They are companions, pets, allies, helpers, spies, and friends to wizards and sorcerers, but they're also frequently overlooked and underestimated. They're familiars.

In legend, familiars were often considered spirits, or even demons, that took the form of animals. They are attributed special powers that they use in the service of their masters.

In DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, familiars are magical beasts that serve as companions and allies. Wizards and sorcerers are able to select a familiar starting at 1st level. While the system for familiars presented in the *Player's Handbook* provides all the basic information a player needs, there is much more to familiars than meets the eye.

New Familiars

Players and Dungeon Masters might enjoy adding these new familiars to their game:

Bird: A number of different birds can serve as familiars. Birds have the advantage of flight, making them excellent spies and messengers. Typical bird familiars include night birds like owls, along with birds of prey like hawks, falcons, and eagles. Seagoing mages might have gulls or even pelicans as familiars. Owls have superb night vision, but they tend to be inactive during the day. Crow and parrot familiars can speak one language (usually Common) in a croaking voice. Predatory birds can hunt or be fed fresh meat (crows will also eat carrion). Other birds generally eat seeds, nuts, and berries.

Dog: Man's best friend can also be an arcanist's best familiar. Dogs have the advantage of being common companions for all kinds of people, so they tend to draw less attention than exotic familiars. They're typically friendly, and they're easy to feed and take care of. Dogs can use their superb senses of smell and hearing to see past simple deceptions. Dog familiars grant their owners a +2 bonus to Sense Motive checks.

Fox: Swift and cunning foxes have long held magical associations. Fox familiars might be of the typical reddish variety or white like the arctic fox, and they display exceptional cleverness. Foxes are found in different types of terrain, and they are carnivores. They're good hunters and even better at evading predators. Fox familiars grant their spellcasters a +2 bonus to Reflex saves.

Hare: The larger cousin of the rabbit, hares are often associated with magic (as the modern magician's feat of

pulling a rabbit from a hat shows). Hares tend to be skittish, although hare familiars are much braver than others of their kind are. They have keen senses of smell and hearing and are swift runners and jumpers. Hare familiars grant their owners a +2 bonus to Listen checks. They eat all sorts of vegetables.

Lizard: A wide variety of small lizards are suitable as familiars, including geckos, iguanas, chameleons, and similar creatures. They tend to be found in warm (usually tropical) forested areas. Lizards are sinuous and usually good climbers, more at home in the treetops than on the ground. They eat insects and small animals, and usually prefer live food, although most will also eat fresh meat or sometimes fruit. Lizard familiars grant their masters a +2 bonus to Climb checks.

Mouse: No familiar is as small and innocuous as a simple mouse, able to move almost anywhere unseen. Mouse familiars provide their masters with a +2 bonus to Hide checks. Mice cannot do any damage in combat. They eat vegetables and grains, primarily.

Otter: Clever otters are amphibious, living near a river, lake, or sea. They're excellent swimmers and divers. Their paws are dexterous enough to crack open the shells of crustaceans and catch fish. An otter familiar grants its master a +2 bonus to Swim checks.

Raccoon: Raccoons are well known for the black "mask" of fur on their faces, making them look like stereotypical burglars. They live up to this reputation by cleverly finding their way into food stores and the like, using their paws almost like hands. Raccoons are found in a variety of climates and eat a wide range of foods (as any camper or farmer will attest). Raccoon familiars grant a +2 bonus to Pick Pockets checks to their masters.

Skunk: The skunk is renowned for its primary means of defense: spraying a foul-smelling musk at its enemies. This musk requires the skunk to make a successful ranged touch attack at a target within 10 feet. Success means the target must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or be nauseated for 1d4 rounds. A skunk familiar's master is immune to the musk attacks of all skunks. Only one target can be affected by the musk, and it can only be used once per day. Skunks are omnivorous and particularly enjoy eating insects.

Squirrel: Squirrels are excellent climbers and jumpers. Their teeth are strong enough to gnaw through soft wood, leather, or rope, given a few minutes. Their paws are also dexterous enough to pick up small objects and hold them (although they can't carry them, since they walk on all fours). They eat fruits, nuts, and grains. A master with a squirrel familiar gains a +2 bonus to Reflex saves.

NEW FAMILIARS

Dog: as listed in the *Monster Manual.*

Fox: CR 1/4; Tiny Animal; HD 1/2 d8+1; hp 5; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 17 (+2 size, +4 Dex, +1 natural); Atk +1 melee (1d3, bite); SQ scent; Face 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 7.
Skills: Hide +4, Listen +4, Move Silently +4, Spot +2, Swim +2, Wilderness Lore +1*. Foxes have a +4 racial bonus to Wilderness Lore checks when tracking by scent.

Hare: CR –; Tiny Animal; HD 1/2 d8; hp 4; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+2 size, +4 Dex); Atk none; SQ scent; Face 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 3, Dex 18, Con 11, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 7.
Skills: Hide +5, Jump +12, Listen +8, Spot +2.

Lizard: as listed in the *Monster Manual.*

Mouse: CR –; Fine Animal; HD 1/4 d8; hp 1; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 15 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 20 (+8 size, +2 Dex); Atk none; SQ scent; Face 1/2 ft. by 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 2, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 3.
Skills: Balance +10, Climb +10, Hide +26, Move Silently +10.

Otter: CR –; Tiny Animal; HD 1/2 d8; hp 2; Init +2 (Dex); Spd 20 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 14 (+2 Dex, +2 size); Atk none; SQ scent; Face 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 3, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 7.
Skills: Hide +14, Move Silently +6, Swim +10.

Raccoon: CR 1/3; Tiny Animal; HD 1d8+2; hp 6; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 16 (+2 size, +3 Dex, +1 natural); Atk +2 melee (1d4+1, bite); SQ scent; Face 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 12, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 5.
Skills: Hide +6, Listen +5, Move Silently +10, Spot +4, Swim +2.

Skunk: CR 1/4; Tiny Animal; HD 1/2 d8; hp 2; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 14 (+2 size, +2 Dex); Atk +2 melee (1d3-1, bite); SA musk; SQ scent; Face 2 1/2 ft. by 2 1/2 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 11, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 5.
Skills: Climb +4, Hide +10, Listen +5, Move Silently +7, Spot +4.

Squirrel: CR –; Diminutive Animal; HD 1/4 d8; hp 1; Init +3 (Dex); Spd 10 ft., climb 15 ft.; AC 17 (+4 size, +3 Dex); Atk none; SQ scent; Face 1 ft. by 1 ft.; Reach 0 ft.; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 2, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 4.
Skills: Climb +15, Hide +22, Move Silently +11, Listen +9. Squirrels gain a +4 racial bonus to Climb, Hide, and Move Silently checks.

FAMILIAR BONUS CHART

Familiar	Bonus
Bird	varies
Dog	+2 Sense Motive
Fox	+2 Reflex saves
Hare	+2 Listen
Lizard	+2 Climb
Mouse	+2 Hide
Otter	+2 Swim
Raccoon	+2 Pick Pockets
Skunk	musk attack
Squirrel	+2 Reflex saves

New Animals

Players are not necessarily limited to the list of animals above. Nearly any small animal can be suitable as a familiar, given the DM's permission. Campaign worlds might even include new animals unknown on Earth, like the otak from Ursula K. LeGuin's *Wizard of Earthsea,* or the jhereg from Steven Brust's novel of the same name. New familiar types should fall into the general range of abilities given in the *Player's Handbook.*

Familiar Feats

Wizards and sorcerers can acquire a number of feats relating to their familiars. These feats generally improve the

FAMILIAR TIP

Familiars can be useful allies for characters of any class. Rogues can use a clever raccoon or crow familiars as an extra pair of hands or eyes in their work (to say nothing of having an ally to help them get out of tight spots). A performing animal can be part of a bard's act. Clerics might have familiars sacred to their deity, while familiars for rangers or barbarians can serve as guides, companions, and helpers in the wilderness.

abilities of the familiar, making it more useful to its master, but they are only available to a wizard or sorcerer with a familiar. At the DM's option, they might also be available to druids with animal companions.

ENSPELL FAMILIAR
General
You can cast spells on your familiar over a distance.

Benefit: You are always considered to be in contact your familiar for the purpose of casting shared spells. Thus any spell you cast on yourself also affects your familiar, as long as it is within 1 mile of you.

Normal: The familiar must be within 5 feet of the caster at the time such a spell is cast.

EXTRA FAMILIAR
General
You have an additional familiar.

Benefit: By taking this feat you get an additional animal familiar of a type described in the *Player's Handbook* (or this article, with the DM's permission). This familiar can be the same type of animal as your first, or a different type. Existing familiar feats apply to the new familiar. So if you have the Construct Familiar feat, for example, the new familiar you call can be a construct. The sorcerer or wizard gains all the benefits of both familiars, but identical bonuses from multiple familiars don't stack. For example, a wizard with both an owl and a cat familiar receives only a +2 bonus to Move Silently checks, not a +4 bonus.

Special: A character can gain this feat multiple times. Each time you take the feat, you can call another familiar.

Special Familiars

Familiars are normally magical beasts with certain special abilities. By taking one of the following feats when the familiar is called, a wizard or sorcerer can have a special type of familiar with additional abilities. These feats only apply to a familiar or familiars called after the feats are taken; they cannot grant new abilities to a familiar you already have.

CONSTRUCT FAMILIAR
General
Your familiar is a construct rather than a living being.

Benefit: Rather than a living creature, your familiar is a magical construct, a mechanical creature animated by magic. The arcane spellcaster must still specify a specific animal to call as a familiar; the familiar that appears, however, is a construct version of that creature. See page 5 in the *Monster Manual* for construct special qualities. Note that you cannot convert an existing non-construct familiar to a construct familiar by taking this feat.

TOKEN FAMILIAR
General
Your familiar can assume an innocuous, inanimate form.

Benefit: Your familiar can, on command, assume a small, inanimate form, much like a *figurine of wondrous power* (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for details). The form can be any Diminutive, stone, hand-held object, typically a statuette of the familiar. In this form, the familiar does not require food or care, and it is easy to hide, but its powers are unavailable to you while in its statue form. The familiar in its statuette form still has a mind, but it cannot use any of its senses, special attacks, or special qualities. If its inanimate form is broken or destroyed, the familiar is slain. It can return to its normal form upon command.

UNDEAD FAMILIAR
General
Your familiar is an undead creature.

Benefit: Rather than a living creature, your familiar is an undead version of a normal animal. See page 6 in the *Monster Manual* for undead special qualities. Note that you cannot convert an existing non-undead familiar to an undead familiar by taking this feat, although if your familiar is slain and you have this feat, you can reanimate your dead familiar with a *raise dead* spell. Undead familiars tend to be associated with characters of evil alignment, particularly necromancers.

Undead familiars can be turned or rebuked. Use the familiar's effective Hit Dice (see the *Player's Handbook,* page 51) for the purposes of turning or rebuking. A familiar fleeing or cowering as the result of a successful turn can't obey commands from the master (any more than it could while fearstruck or paralyzed). Raising a destroyed undead familiar brings it back as a living creature.

Familiar Spells

Spellcasters can use a number of spells to enhance the abilities of their familiars and make them more useful, both in and out of combat. See the *Player's Handbook* for details on these and other spells.

Enlarge: This spell can make a familiar larger and stronger, although it does not improve hit points, Armor Class, and so on.

Mirror Image: Casters can use share spells to cast this spell on their familiars, creating a flurry of familiars to confound opponents.

Polymorph Other: A *polymorph other* spell can turn the familiar into any creature the caster wishes (including a humanoid), while retaining its loyalty, empathic link, and inherent magical abilities (like spell resistance). This can be dangerous, however, especially if the new form is intended for combat purposes.

New Spells

Familiar's Sense
Divination
Level: Sor/Wiz 2
Range: See text
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 minute/level
Casting Time: 1 action
Target: Caster's familiar
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

Familiar's sense allows you to perceive some of what your familiar does, regardless of the distance between you. As a partial action each round for the duration of the spell, you can replace one of your senses with one of your familiar's senses. For example, the

round the spell is cast, you can choose sight and see only through your familiar's eyes. The following round, you can choose hearing and hear only what your familiar hears, but regain your own sight. The familiar doesn't lose any of its senses while you borrow them.

The spell does not grant you the ability to communicate with your familiar if it is outside the range of the empathic link. You use your normal Listen and Spot skills to notice things, modified by the familiar's Alertness feat. Lead or magical protections block the spell.

Familiar's Touch
Conjuration
Level: Sor/Wiz 2
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 minute/level
Casting Time: 1 action
Target: Caster's familiar
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

After casting this spell, you can cast any spells with a range of Touch through your familiar (your familiar touches the intended target to deliver the spell's effect). Unlike the normal familiar touch ability (see the *Player's Handbook,* page 51), you and your familiar do not need to be in physical contact when the spell is cast. The familiar must still make a touch attack against the target to deliver the spell.

Share Life
Necromancy
Level: Sor/Wiz 2
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 1 full round
Target: Caster's familiar
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

Share life allows you to transfer some of your life-force to your familiar. You can transfer a number of hit points equal to your level to your familiar by touch, healing any damage it has suffered by taking the damage onto yourself. You cannot increase your familiar's hit points beyond its normal level; you can only heal damage it has suffered.

Familiar's Form
Necromancy
Level: Sor/Wiz 3
Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)
Components: V, S
Duration: Until the caster returns to his body
Casting Time: 1 full round
Area of Effect: Caster's familiar
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No

With a round of concentration, you can transfer your mind and spirit into your familiar's body as if you were using a *magic jar* spell (see the *Player's Handbook* for details). Your familiar's spirit is harmlessly suppressed while you inhabit its body, while your body falls into a death-like trance. You can use your familiar's body as if it were your own. If your familiar is normally capable of speech, you can cast spells with verbal components. If your body is killed while you are in your familiar's form, you become trapped there. If your familiar dies while you are possessing it, you are automatically returned to your own body and suffer the normal effects of your familiar's demise.

You cannot return to your own body unless your familiar is within the range of the spell.

Call Familiar
Transmutation [Teleportation]
Level: Sor/Wiz 3
Range: 1 mile
Components: V, S
Duration: Instantaneous
Casting Time: 1 action
Target: Caster's familiar
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

This spell summons your familiar into your presence from up to 1 mile away (within the range of your empathic link). The familiar appears immediately, anywhere within arm's reach of you.

Keeping Your Familiar

When treated well, a familiar makes a valuable companion. Familiars are great for supplying last-minute rescues when the heroes are captured and imprisoned by the villain; they can steal keys, gnaw through ropes, and provide great distractions. Familiars can also run (or hop, or fly) for help when their master is in trouble. A surprise attack from a familiar can distract an enemy at a vital moment, giving the heroes the upper hand. In short, a familiar is a valuable ally for anyone to have.

REEL HEROES

by Rich Redman, Jeff Grubb, Cory J. Herndon, Eric Haddock & Matthew Sernett

Roleplayers have been putting their favorite movie characters—or thinly-disguised versions of same—into their games for years. Now the release of the D&D movie provides both good and evil characters ready-made for your campaign. Whether you pit a whole new band of heroes against the villainous Profion, join Ridley and Snails on a criminal escapade, or ride out on a quest with the enigmatic ranger Norda, the main players in *Dungeons & Dragons* will make excellent additions to any game.

The World of Izmer: Sumdall, Some Don't

Perhaps the most intriguing possibility offered by the D&D film is an entirely new world in which to play. The world of Izmer is similar to a typical D&D setting with a few notable differences. If you set your campaign before the events in the film, the DM might choose to have the following rules apply:

Arcane spellcasters rule the society from the capital city of Sumdall. Wizards and sorcerers gain a +2 circumstance bonus to Intimidate checks made against non-spellcasters, and a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy checks made against other arcane spellcasters.

The Thieves' Guild of Antius City wields more power than any non-thief in Sumdall is aware. Any PC with at least one level of rogue receives a +2 circumstance bonus to Diplomacy and Gather Information checks in Antius City.

Meet or Play?

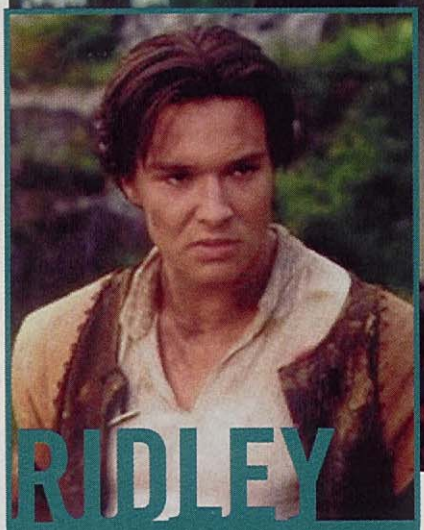
Whether or not you decide to set your game in Izmer, players might want to play as the heroes described here—certainly a viable way to jump-start a campaign. These characters can also serve as a template for the PCs in your 3rd-level adventure. It's more likely, however, that the PCs will run across Ridley, Snails, Marina, or the others as NPCs, and that the DM will use them to shape the plot of the scenario. As we see in the film, a run-in with Damodar can be the perfect way to throw a group of PCs together!

Here are some ways to bring the heroes and villains of the movie into your campaign:

- The PCs could encounter Ridley and Snails as another adventuring party in any dungeon where great treasure is rumored. Depending on the alignment of the party, Ridley and Snails could join up with the PCs for mutual protection.
- Elwood bursts into the local tavern, and his helmet is missing. After determining that the adventuring party wasn't the group that took his helmet, he might offer them his services if they help him get his helmet back. The party might even learn that the loss of his helmet leaves Elwood even more prone to barbarian rage.
- The party encounters a young mage (Marina) on the road. She's been sent by her mentor to locate rare spell components in the neighborhood dungeon and asks for the party's help.

Not all of the characters in the movie are the same level, and they might not necessarily fit into your current campaign. Evil as he is, Damodar is a piece of cake compared to Profion, so plan accordingly.

Just don't forget the popcorn.



RIDLEY

Male human
1st-level fighter/2nd-level rogue

Strength	16 (+3)	Fort. Save	+3
Dexterity	18 (+4)	Ref. Save	+9
Constitution	13 (+1)	Will Save	+2
Intelligence	15 (+2)	Alignment	CG
Wisdom	10 (+0)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	13 (+1)	Size	M (5'10")

Armor Class	14
Hit Points	23
Melee Attack	+5
Ranged Attack	+6

Special: Sneak attack +1d6, evasion.
Skills: Appraise +6, Balance +6, Bluff +4, Climb +7, Disable Device +6, Hide +8, Jump +8, Listen +8, Move Silently +8, Open Lock +8, Pick Pocket +7, Ride +8, Search +6, Sense Motive +3, Spot +6, Swim +7, Tumble +9.
Feats: Alertness, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Toughness.
Languages: Common, Halfling, Gnome.
Possessions: Longsword, two daggers, Backpack, rations, waterskin, bedroll, sack, flint and steel, thieves' tools, 50-foot rope.

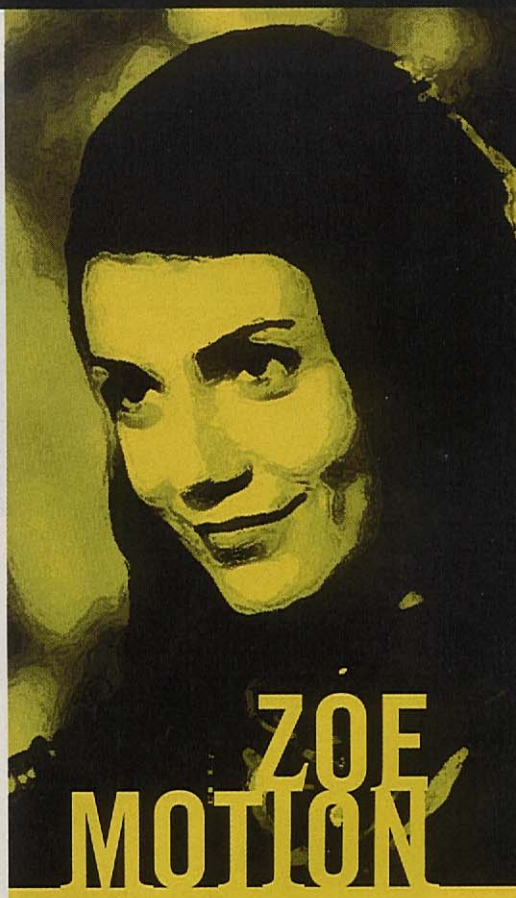
Background

Ridley is the son of a merchant. His father's death left him to survive by his wits on the street. He met and teamed up with Snails soon after, and the two have been together ever since. He has grown up to be a swashbuckling rogue, always looking for some daring feat that no other thief would try.

Roleplaying Notes

Ridley is brash but loyal to his friends, in particular to his partner and ally Snails. He hates injustice in all its forms and dislikes people who look down upon him for his common origins. Lacking magical aptitude, Ridley feels trapped by the constraints of Sumdall's society. He dislikes mages and takes every opportunity to harass them. Although he enjoys the action and risk of his roguish exploits with Snails, he is not proud of what he does.

Ridley is a wild card. He is drawn toward danger like a moth to a flame. As such he can easily be inserted into any plot or adventure you might already have underway. Simply put Ridley near the action and he's bound to get involved, especially if the PCs look like the underdogs.



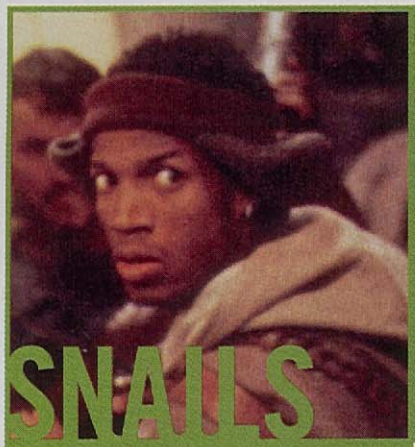
ZOE MOTION

Star of the D&D Movie Zoe McClellan on Marina

by Cory J. Herndon

Zoe McLellan (that's "Zo," like "yo" by the way) is not one of the better known names in the cast of *Dungeons & Dragons*. She's got a face that you're sure you've seen somewhere before though, and for good reason. She's made many appearances on television since 1994, including guest roles on shows like *Nowhere Man*, *Star Trek Voyager*, *The Invisible Man*, and of course she portrayed Quinn Mallory's evil alternate female self on a memorable 3rd season episode of *Sliders*. Her film career has been more eclectic, ranging from roles in *Mr. Holland's Opus* to *Inventing the Abbotts*.

Twenty-six-year-old Zoe McLellan is no stranger to the northwest, home of this fine publication. "I lived right in Seattle most of my life, right downtown. Then my parents pulled an evil trick on me and we had to move to Port Orchard. Ouch! I went to South Kitsap High School in Port Orchard, Washington. It was quite the culture



SNAILS

Male human
3rd-level rogue

Strength	14 (+2)	Fort. Save	+3
Dexterity	16 (+3)	Ref. Save	+8
Constitution	15 (+2)	Will Save	+2
Intelligence	11 (+0)	Alignment	CN
Wisdom	12 (+1)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	12 (+1)	Size	M (6')

Armor Class 13 Melee Attack +4
Hit Points 18 Ranged Attack +5

Special: Sneak attack +2d6, evasion, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC).
Skills: Appraise +2, Bluff +7, Climb +5, Diplomacy +5, Escape Artist +6, Hide +9, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Open Lock +5, Pick Pocket +11, Search +6, Spot +6.
Feats: Alertness, Lightning Reflexes, Run.
Languages: Common.
Possessions: Two daggers, backpack, rations, waterskin, bedroll, sack, flint and steel, thieves' tools.

Background

Snails is an accomplished thief, a master of the con and the quick grab, and Ridley's best friend. Snails claims to have taught Ridley everything he knows, but the truth is that Snails hasn't been a thief much longer than Ridley. Snails and Ridley have accomplished a number of daring raids, and Snails is the voice of reason in any plan they hatch.

Roleplaying Notes

Like Ridley, Snails is at home on the streets of Sumdall, but unlike Ridley he is comfortable with his lot in life. Snails is less inclined to get involved in other people's problems and would prefer to avoid trouble and go unnoticed. Some think him a coward, but in truth Snails just values his life more than honor. Despite this, Snails is unflinchingly loyal to his friend Ridley, and Snails's strong sense of danger usually keeps Ridley from getting into too much trouble.

Snails will more likely attempt to con or pickpocket the PCs than help them out in a fight. He'll fight if he has to, but he'd prefer to talk his way out of confrontations or failing that, run away. But if Ridley gets into trouble or agrees to help the PCs, count on Snails to be right behind him.

MARINA

Female human
3rd-level wizard

Strength	8 (–1)	Fort. Save	+1
Dexterity	15 (+2)	Ref. Save	+2
Constitution	10 (+0)	Will Save	+5
Intelligence	18 (+4)	Alignment	LG
Wisdom	14 (+2)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	14 (+2)	Size	M (5' 6")

Armor Class 12 Melee Attack +0
Hit Points 9 Ranged Attack +3

Skills: Concentration +6, Diplomacy +8, Hide +5, Move Silently +8, Ride +5, Search +10, Spellcraft +10, Spot +8.
Feats: Scribe Scroll, Silent Spell, Toughness, Quicken Spell.
Languages: Celestial, Common, Elven, Draconic, Terran.
Spells (4/3/2): 0—*detect magic, mending, read magic, resistance;* 1st—*animate rope, identify, magic missile;* 2nd—*spectral hand, levitate.*
Possessions: *rope of entanglement,* two daggers.

Background

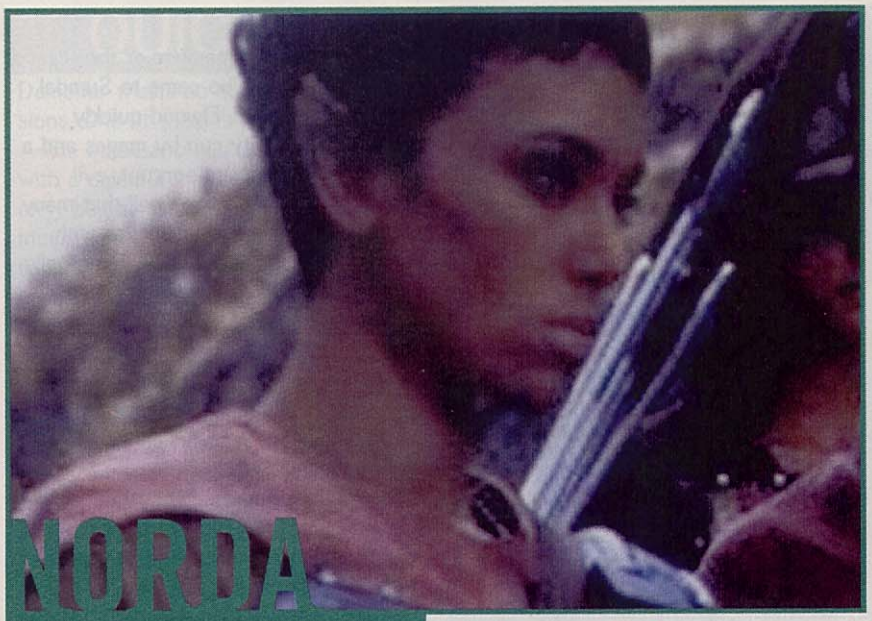
Marina is the personal assistant to Vildan, the Royal Mage of Sumdal. Being exposed to Vildan's teachings is a great advantage over other mages, but Marina has found that being an assistant isn't a glorious job. She spends her time shelving books and fetching spell components for her master, with little opportunity to practice her own magic.

She is anxious to do more than learn patience and fetch components—whether she knows it or not, she's ready for adventure.

Roleplaying Notes

Marina is loyal to the crown and to the status quo of the empire, and she genuinely believes that the current class structure is justified. As such, she can come across as elitist and condescending to anyone who isn't a mage. She treats all mages equally, viewing wizards as learned scholars and sorcerers as natural talents, both of whom deserve respect.

PCs will most likely encounter Marina in the queen's castle if they are in Sumdal, or on the road if outside the city. She rarely visits the streets of Sumdal, preferring to associate with other mages and members of the court. If on the road, she's there for a specific purpose and will not take kindly to being diverted—and she will not allow herself to be bothered by non-mages at any rate.



NORDA

Female elf
7th-level ranger

Strength	16 (+3)	Fort. Save	+5
Dexterity	18 (+4)	Ref. Save	+6
Constitution	10 (+0)	Will Save	+2
Intelligence	14 (+2)	Alignment	LN
Wisdom	14 (+2)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	15 (+2)	Size	M (5' 6")

Armor Class	22	Melee Attack	+10/+5
Hit Points	43	Ranged Attack	+10/+5

Special: Favored enemies: (1st—humans, 2nd—dragons).
Skills: Animal Empathy +8, Hide +9, Intuit Direction +8, Jump +9, Listen +9, Move Silently +9, Search +8, Spot +9, Swim +6, Wilderness Lore +12.
Feats: Expertise, Far Shot, Point Blank Shot, Track.
Languages: Common, Elven, Dwarven.
Spells (1): 1st—*pass without trace.*
Possessions: *+2 breastplate, bracers of archery,* four masterwork daggers, masterwork longsword, mighty composite longbow (+3), quiver with twenty masterwork arrows.

Background

Norda has served the royalty of Izmer for as long as anyone can remember, but thanks to her elven heritage she does not show her age. She holds no official post in the government, but this allows the royalty to use her to accomplish things that the Council of Mages would otherwise prevent them from doing. Norda serves with the utmost loyalty, and only a chosen few understand why.

Roleplaying Notes

Norda is normally taciturn and to the point when she speaks. She is always focused on getting the job done and doesn't waste energy on idle chatter. She is loyal to the crown unto death and considers serving it as her highest priority. Quick-witted and deadly in combat, she serves the royal family well.

The PCs could encounter Norda while she is on one of her missions, or if they are well known, be recruited by Norda to help the crown. If for some reason the PCs seem to be at odds with the crown, Norda will hunt them relentlessly.

shock, to go from the city to this little town." She wanted to perform from an early age. "I always knew I wanted to act." Although there were no actors in her family, and "no one ever really encouraged it, either," McLellan started pursuing performance in high school.

"I was part of the South Kitsap acting ensemble," she remembers, "It was a group of twelve people. We traveled to different grade schools doing different shows—public interest shows about the environment with singing and dancing." McLellan made her initial foray into television on a show devoted to a different kind of public interest. "My first job on TV—my first paid acting job—was on *America's Most Wanted.* It was shot in Pendleton, Oregon." McLellan portrayed the victim and was happy to learn that the suspect in the crime was apprehended "like that night. The night they aired the show."

McLellan spent the next couple of years in Portland and Seattle doing commercials and taking acting classes. Her earliest roles were on what she calls "really bad shows and some really funny shows that didn't last long" that were shot in the northwest, such as *Medicine Ball* and *Under Suspicion.*

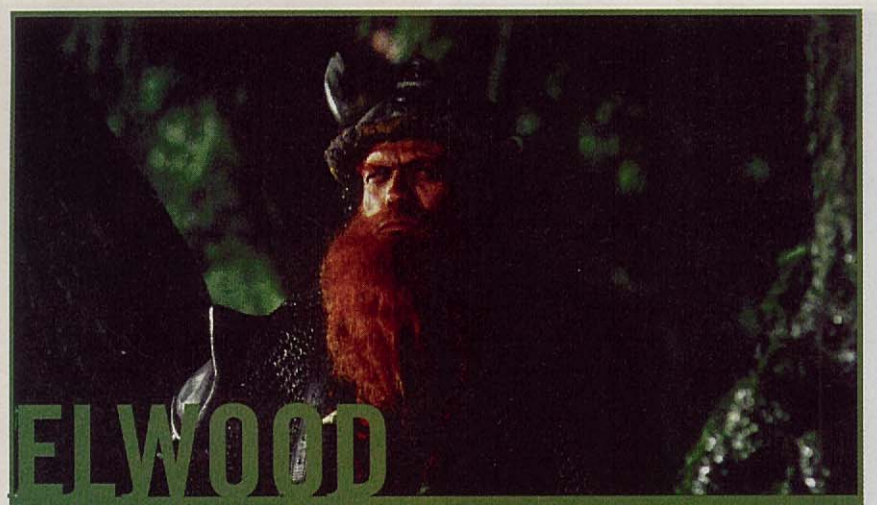
Fast Casting

Dungeons & Dragons came her way through the usual channels. "It was a really quick process for me," the actress recalls. "I had heard of the game, but I didn't know anything about it. All I did was read the script and throw myself into the character." She wasn't the only

FUN WITH SEWERS

One of McLellan's favorite scenes, which did not make the final cut of the picture, took place during the heroes' initial escape from Damodar into the sewers below Sumdall. "Maybe it'll be on the DVD—at least that's what Corey [Solomon] tells me," she laughs. "Basically, Damodar is chasing after us, and we've just met the dwarf." The dwarf, of course, is Elwood, played by Lee Arenberg. Marina is running with Ridley and Snails at this point, when "We jump into this pile of trash, and end up going down this chute." The adventurers end up in a dank catacomb-like sewer. "That was an actual sewer in Prague," McLellan described, "It was full of icky water, little rats, and all kinds of fun stuff. It was freezing and disgusting."

Believe it or not, that quality ended up making the experience all the better. "There's something really cool about wearing a wet suit and shooting down a slide." As the scene progresses, Marina—still a prim and proper apprentice mage, remember—launches an "I can't believe you got me into this mess" tirade at Snails and Ridley. "Then this huge pile of garbage comes piling on top of my head." And this was her favorite scene? "I felt good about it, because as the actor you know it's coming. But as the character you can't know it's coming." The cast and crew, at least as far as Zoe was concerned, also bonded over the scene. "Everyone was miserable, but we all had a great time, just laughing our heads off. But it got cut."



ELWOOD

Male dwarf
3rd-level barbarian

Strength	18 (+4)	Fort. Save	+7
Dexterity	13 (+1)	Ref. Save	+2
Constitution	18 (+4)	Will Save	+1
Intelligence	11 (+0)	Alignment	CG
Wisdom	10 (+0)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	10 (+0)	Size	M (5' 2")

Armor Class	16	Melee Attack	+7
Hit Points	36	Ranged Attack	+4

Special: Rage 1/day, fast movement, uncanny dodge (Dex bonus to AC).
Skills: Climb +10, Intimidate +2, Listen +6, Search +1, Spot +1, Swim +10.
Feats: Exotic Weapon Proficiency (dwarven waraxe), Power Attack.
Languages: Common.
Possessions: Chainmail, masterwork dwarven waraxe.

Background

Elwood is a proud member of the Oakenshield clan who came to Sumdal looking for fortune. Elwood quickly found that in a city run by mages and a Royal Guard run by a corrupt, evil commander, there weren't all that many opportunities for good dwarves with strong arms and sharp axes. Eventually, Elwood spent his savings living in the city and was reduced to sleeping on the streets—yet he never let his confidence wane. He knew that if he persevered, the gold he sought would come his way.

Roleplaying Notes

Although a barbarian, Elwood generally keeps his cool and doesn't use his rage ability often. However, he does take personal offense if his helmet is touched or jostled.

PCs might encounter Elwood as a member of another adventuring party or in a tavern deep in his cups.

DAMODAR

Male human
10th-level fighter

Strength	17 (+3)	Fort. Save	+10
Dexterity	13 (+1)	Ref. Save	+6
Constitution	17 (+3)	Will Save	+4
Intelligence	13 (+1)	Alignment	NE
Wisdom	13 (+1)	Speed	20 ft.
Charisma	11 (+0)	Size	M (5' 10")

Armor Class	21	Melee Attack	+13/+8/+3
Hit Points	85	Ranged Attack	+13/+8/+3

Skills: Bluff +3, Diplomacy +5, Gather Information +5, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (local) +2.
Feats: Dodge, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bladed gauntlet), Expertise, Improved Critical (bladed gauntlet), Improved Disarm, Leadership, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Weapon Focus (bladed gauntlet), Whirlwind Attack.
Languages: Common, Draconic.
Possessions: *+3 half plate,* masterwork bladed gauntlet*, *+3 shocking burst longsword.*
*See *Sword and Fist.*

Background

Damodar is a treacherous, expert soldier driven to one thing: self gratification. If the empire were not ruled by mages, it would certainly be in Damodar's grip.

Damodar began his quest for power in Sumdal and rose through the ranks using treachery, assassination, and a willingness to do anything, regardless of how evil, to advance himself. During these pursuits, he encountered Profion. The two are kindred spirits and recognized a partner, of sorts, within each other. Damodar can follow Profion to the top, and Profion can use Damodar to perform the dirty work he couldn't be seen doing. When Profion was given the assignment to evaluate the defenses of the queen's castle, he took advantage of the opportunity to assign Damodar as Commander of the Royal Guard, a position that allows him to draw upon the military resources of Sumdal for whatever purpose Damodar sees fit. Under this aegis, Damodar was able to secure materials for Profion's experiments, and of course, kill anyone who got in the way.

While Damodar resents the fact that Profion is in charge and there seems to be little he can do about it, he also relishes his current position—it allows him the freedom to express his evil desires with near impunity.

Roleplaying Notes

Damodar and Profion tolerate each other. Ultimately though, Profion is in charge.

When encountered with Profion, Damodar always defers to the mage. Otherwise, Damodar is usually in control. He keeps a close-knit retinue of trusted soldiers at his side whenever he goes on an official (or Profion-ordered) mission, but otherwise he prefers to keep to himself, initiating whatever nefarious plots he has dreamed up.

Should the PCs encounter Damodar in Sumdal, he will pay them no mind unless they have something he wants or if the PCs present a threat to him personally.

QUICKSAND RUG

Damodar trusts no one and has many traps in his bedroom and on his possessions. One of them is the *quicksand rug*.

The *quicksand rug* looks like a normal small rug, approximately 5 feet square, with a colorful and intricate abstract pattern. Anyone who steps on it immediately begins to be drawn in to an extradimensional space filled with a substance much like quicksand. It takes 2 rounds for a creature, regardless of weight, to sink completely under the surface of the rug. On the first round, the sinking creature can attempt a Strength check (DC 25) to get free. During this round, the victim is considered prone, loses any Dexterity bonus to AC, and cannot move from the rug (nor turn in place) but is otherwise able to conduct melee attacks and cast spells. During the second round, the Strength check DC to break free is 30, and the creature is considered helpless.

If the victim remains on the rug for 2 consecutive rounds, he is drawn completely into the quicksand substance and begins to suffocate (see the suffocation rules in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). A suffocating victim can be pulled out of the rug with a successful Strength check (DC 30).

A trapped creature can be freed by touching the rug and uttering a command word. The pattern on the rug changes whenever anyone steps onto it or sinks into it, alerting the owner to the rug's recent activity. The rug can hold an amount of mass equivalent to a *bag of holding 1*.

Caster Level: 9th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *Leomund's secret chest; Market Price:* 3,500 gp; *Cost to Create:* 1,750 gp + 140 XP; *Weight:* 15 lb.

ROD OF SAVRILLE*

The Rod of Savrille was created by the archmage Savrille in an age long past. The gods were so offended by its creation that they cursed him to guard it forever. It is a major artifact that has the power to summon and dominate red dragons.

Dragon Summoning: The rod can be used once per day to summon 2,500 Hit Dice of Large and Huge red dragons. The summoned dragons remain for one day.

Domination: Dragons summoned by the rod are automatically *dominated,* as per the spell *dominate monster.* Whoever holds the rod *dominates* the dragons. The *domination* effect has a duration of one day. Red dragons asked to do something against their natures can make a Will save (DC 30) to resist the order and break the hold of the *domination* effect. Obviously self-destructive orders are not carried out.

Caution: If you allow these powerful artifacts in your campaign, be prepared for the consequences. Some items are best left on the silver screen.

one. "There were about five bazillion girls there, so I thought nothing of it and let it go." Three months later her phone rang again. "I was the last principal cast. I showed up, did a couple of scenes with Justin, and apparently they took the tape, sent it to Joel Silver, and shipped it to Prague." Two days later she found out that she got the part. Eight days after that she was on a plane bound for Prague. "It was really quick," she understates.

Three and a half months in a foreign city didn't phase McLellan. "I was in this place that's near the old town square, near the heart of the city. On my days off, I could actually walk around, do a little sightseeing. I'm a loner. I'm a tough girl. I just roamed around, which is something that I've kind of done all my life. I love getting lost and not knowing how to ask for directions."

The role was a departure from her earlier tough girl roles, she says. "Marina, at least in the very beginning of this film, is much more of a princess. She starts out an aristocrat, a mage; she's upper class. She gets thrown into a big, messy adventure about the Rod of Savrille with an elf, a dwarf, a hero, and a freak named Snails."

She shares a mutual respect for Bruce Payne, who plays Damodar. "The trickiest scene for me was this scene with Damodar. He's a very good bad guy. He had to read my mind with these tentacles that come out of his head and his ears. Tentacles come around and caress my face, my ears and my neck. They pretty much suck my brains out."

Babe in the Woods

Like all the heroic characters in the film, Marina grows quite a bit over the course of the adventure. "She learns how to be compassionate," explains McLellan. "Through this adventure . . . she ends up learning that all people, or beings, are equal. There's no such thing as upper class and lower class, and no one is better than anyone else."

McLellan grew to know her character in much the same way the audience will as they watch the film. This was largely due to how late in the process she was cast. "I think the script I auditioned with was the shooting script," she recalls, "There were always little changes due to weather, or to time, but my character pretty much stayed the way she was."

PROFION

Male human
15th-level wizard

Strength	12 (+1)	Fort. Save	+6
Dexterity	13 (+1)	Ref. Save	+7
Constitution	10 (+0)	Will Save	+10
Intelligence	17 (+3)	Alignment	LE
Wisdom	11 (+0)	Speed	30 ft.
Charisma	17 (+3)	Size	M (5' 11")

Armor Class	21	Melee Attack	+8/+3
Hit Points	30	Ranged Attack	+8/+3

Special: Profion's *robe of the archmagi* grants him SR 17.
Skills: Concentration +17, Bluff +10, Diplomacy +13, Innuendo +8, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Scry +6, Spellcraft +10, Spot +4.
Feats: Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Rod, Craft Wand, Enlarge Spell, Empower Spell, Improved Initiative, Martial Weapon Proficiency (longsword), Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Concentration), Spell Focus (Evocation).
Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elven.
Spells (4/5/5/5/8/4/3/2/1): 0—*daze, detect magic, open/close, ray of frost;* 1st—*burning hands, hold portal, mage armor, magic missile* x2; 2nd—*bull's strength, blur, darkness, darkvision, flaming sphere;* 3rd—*fireball* x2, *haste, hold person, lightning bolt;* 4th—*charm monster, confusion, ice storm, phantasmal killer* x2, *wall of ice* x2, *wall of fire;* 5th—*feeblemind, prying eyes, summon monster V, teleport;* 6th—*chain lightning, disintegrate, eyebite;* 7th—*spell turning, summon monster VII;* 8th—*mass charm.*
Spellbook: 0—*arcane mark, daze, detect magic, mending, open/close, ray of frost, resistance;* 1st—*alarm, burning hands, color spray, hold portal, mage armor, magic missile, magic weapon, message, true strike, unseen servant;* 2nd—*bull's strength, blur, darkness, darkvision, daylight, flaming sphere, glitterdust, hypnotic pattern, invisibility, knock;* 3rd—*displacement, dispel magic, explosive runes, fireball, fly, gust of wind, haste, hold person, lightning bolt;* 4th—*charm monster, confusion, fire trap, ice storm, phantasmal killer, rainbow pattern, shout, stoneskin, wall of ice, wall of fire;* 5th—*feeblemind, passwall, persistent image, prying eyes, summon monster V, teleport;* 6th—*chain lightning, disintegrate, eyebite, guards and wards, legend lore, permanent image, flesh to stone;* 7th—*forcecage, ethereal jaunt, prismatic spray, spell turning, summon monster VII;* 8th—*binding, horrid wilting, mass charm, sunburst, symbol.*
Possessions: *+2 amulet of natural armor, +3 ring of protection, +2 dagger, +4 defending quarterstaff, potion of blur* x3, *potion of Charisma, ring of wizardry IV, robe of the archmagi,* scroll of *wall of ice,* scroll of *summon monster VII, wand of wall of ice, wand of fireball, wand of lightning bolt, wand of hold person.*

Background

In an empire dominated by mages, Profion stands out as one of the most influential. His tower is the highest of all the council mages, giving him a lordly view of the surrounding city. Well respected for his skill at wizardry and politics, the common people speak of dark sorceries and evil experiments, but his peers dismiss this as superstitious rumor.

Profion is as powerful as a council mage could hope to become . . . but he wants more. Profion has always aspired to rule, and nothing will stop him in his pursuit of the throne. But to control Izmer, one must control dragons, so for years he experimented with various magics that might give him that power and at times he has come close. But with the death of both the young empress's parents, he now has an opportunity to gain control of the Royal Rod of Dragon Control.

Roleplaying Notes

Profion exudes charisma and confidence. He thinks of himself as a natural leader and assumes that his orders will be carried out flawlessly. If he finds out otherwise, punishment is swift and often lethal.

Profion seeks the throne of Izmer by any means necessary. He believes he is destined to rule and despises those who think otherwise. He values the Council as allies but doesn't have any true loyalty to them, as he knows that they would be hard-pressed to defeat him in combat.

Profion's greatest fault is overconfidence. He relishes having power over others and toys with those he thinks are weak. Profion has little respect for those without magic and rarely considers them a threat.

The PCs are unlikely to encounter Profion unless they have political clout. If that is the case, Profion is likely to treat them respectfully in an attempt to win them to whatever goal he has in mind at the moment. If that is not the case, Profion will probably set some minions to the task of dealing with the PCs and forget about them.

PROFION'S IMP

This devilish creature serves Profion to help him establish his tyrannical rule and to foster evil in Izmer.

Imp: 14 hp.

As for the future of Zoe McLellan, have no fear. The actress has a development deal with Warner Brothers studios and has done a few pilots since finishing D&tD. "I did a pilot called *M3K,* a modern-day Three Musketeers show. I played D'artagnan. They were all male, and me. It was excellent." Although the pilot was not picked up, she hopes the development deal—which essentially means that the studio folks are looking for projects with her in mind—will bear fruit. Until then, "It's just back to the world of auditions and hoping that more movies come my way. When I got the part in *D&tD,* I signed a contract that said I would do the next two sequels, just in case. Hopefully that'll happen. My real interest is doing more feature films. That's the goal."

PORTAL DUST

This sparkling gold dust is obviously magical. A handful thrown in the air creates a 5-foot diameter *gate* to another point within two miles. If the dust thrower has no particular location in mind or if the location is out of range, the dust has no effect and that handful is rendered useless.

Unlike the *gate* spell, *portal dust* cannot be used for planar travel nor to call creatures. The *gate* remains open for three rounds.

Portal dust is typically stored in small silk bags.

Caster Level: 17th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *gate, teleport without error; Market Price:* 12,000 gp; *Cost to Create:* 6,000 gp + 480 XP; *Weight:* –

ROYAL ROD OF DRAGON CONTROL*

The Royal Rod of Dragon Control has been the source royal power in Izmer for generations. It is a major artifact that has the power to summon and dominate gold dragons.

Dragon Summoning: The rod can be used once per day to summon 2,000 Hit Dice of Large and Huge gold dragons. The summoned dragons remain for one day.

Domination: Dragons summoned by the rod are automatically *dominated,* as per the spell *dominate monster.* Whoever holds the rod *dominates* the dragons. The *domination* effect has a duration of one day. Gold dragons asked to do something against their natures can make a Will save (DC 30) to resist the order and break the hold of the *domination* effect. Obviously self-destructive orders are not carried out.

*Caution: *If you allow these powerful artifacts in your campaign, be prepared for the consequences. Some items are best left on the silver screen.*

To answer the call of the Strictured Lands,
Fool Wolf must first survive the schemes of the city of gold.

THE OPAL OF NAH

BY J. GREGORY KEYES

ILLUSTRATED BY JUSTIN SWEET

FOOL WOLF LAY IN A PILE OF DEAD MEN, trying not to gag as a maggot crawled across his lip. The inside of his eyelids had faded from red to black, so he knew the sun had set, but his ears told him the cracked granite plaza surrounding him still swarmed with warriors—fewer than this morning, when he had first arrived, but enough to kill Fool Wolf if he so much as twitched.

A handful of squirming corpse-eaters spilled on his face as two of the warriors lifted a body from the pile.

"How could this happen?" one of them said. The speaker's boot brushed Fool Wolf's ear. The language he spoke was that of Nah, which differed only a little from the dialects of the mountain tribes Fool Wolf had traveled among for months on his way to this place.

"The end must be upon us, Uteb," another man murmured. "Our greatest hero has turned against us, slaughtered the priests that raised him, and stolen the keys to the gates of the Strictured Land. What else can it mean?"

Hands clamped Fool Wolf's ankles and wrists. He let his body go as lax as possible—the corpses around him had long since lost their after-death stiffness.

They threw him, and he landed in an uncomfortable position, still among corpses.

"At least that one didn't come apart," Uteb said.

"Hurry, you two!" A more distant voice shouted. "The Heroq-rite priest shrove their souls free. If we don't get them to the well by midnight, their spirits will be lost to the Strictured Land. The poor bastards have already had to rot out here for four days."

"How does that matter, anymore?" The warrior nearest Fool Wolf wondered. "The Opal of Nah has sundered the gate. What are a few more souls lost to the Strictured Land next to what will come from that?"

"I don't know, Shelof," Uteb replied. "But they don't tell us everything, the priesthood. The Rector commanded we clear these bodies and kill any strangers near the gate on sight, and that's

what I'll do, because if anyone can save us, it's the Lord Rector."

"You think so?" Shelof replied. "Some say his travels abroad infected him with strange ideas."

"Nonsense."

"Really? The great Uzhdon, our priceless Opal, traveled abroad, and see what he has done."

Uteb was silent after that.

A BIT LATER, Fool Wolf discovered he had been moved to a wagon of some sort, for it jolted forward and then rumbled along the roughly paved road he had walked in on.

The drivers weren't Shelof and Uteb, but two other men. After a few moments of chatter, he gathered their names were Izhar and Potek.

"They shouldn't have tried to stand before Uzhdon, the poor bastards," Izhar offered.

"What choice did they have?" Potek replied, in a voice as low and grating as a turning millstone. "The Rector commanded it."

"But Uzhdon can't be slain by superior numbers. He bears the totemsword Hukop. He can die in only fair combat."

"What would you have done to stop him?"

Izhar considered that for a moment. "If all of these men had fought him one at a time, single combat—"

"—they would still be dead," Petok finished. "No swordsman is better than Uzhdon."

"Probably. But Uzhdon would still be fighting, you see? It would have gone slower. It would have given the priests time to think of something."

"Huh. Not a bad idea, that," Petok rumbled.

"But," Izhar said, lowering his voice further, "who is to say Uzhdon should be stopped?"

"He's gone mad, that's why! If he awakes the sleepers in the Strictured land—"

"Uzhdon is our best, our chosen. Only the pure of heart can bear Hukop, after all. Suppose it's Uzhdon who is in the right, and the lord Rector who has gone mad? What did we see, after all? Uzhdon and some foreign princess arrive from the southern mountains. The Rector's men come to greet him. They all vanish into the temple, and then Uzhdon fights his way out. He cuts a path straight to the gate, opens it with the Heroq priesthood key, then seals it behind him."

"As I said," Petok growled, "mad. And he didn't take the sacred book to guide him—he left it in the Heroq-rite chamber. The darkness or the traps might have already killed him."

"Uzhdon can't be killed by traps, either, not if his heart is pure. I think it is, and many of us trust the Opal more than we do the Rector." Izhar's voice dropped even lower. "The Hawk-Totem men are all with Uzhdon. They've sent for his brother, Ilupor."

"For what purpose?"

"There is one more key, held by the Sipost priesthood. But who will they give it to?"

"The Rector, of course," Petok replied. "So he can follow Uzhdon and stop him from waking the sleepers."

"Maybe they will give it to the Rector," Izhar replied, slyly. "Maybe not. When Ilupor arrives, perhaps we will see something different." The cart began to slow.

"Ah. There is the well ahead; I can see the torches. You did not hear me speak of this, eh Petok?"

"I did not. But what I did not hear, I will nevertheless consider. The Rector has made many enemies."

"They say Ilupor is coming tomorrow evening, on the west road. None will look for him to come from that direction." Izhar's voice changed inflection. "Unless he is betrayed."

"You shouldn't give out secrets to those you aren't sure of," Petok warned. "You need not worry about me, but be careful."

"I am careful, Petok. I know your heart. Only those men most corrupted by the Rector would betray Ilupor. They are few, and easily known."

Fool Wolf didn't know what the well was, exactly, but it didn't sound like something he wanted to be thrown down. Hiding in the corpses had been his only choice when the warriors had arrived, but he was now rather weary of their company.

He rolled from the cart. The soft thump he made when he hit the road wasn't audible over the clattering of wheels on stone, and in the dark he didn't imagine the two men would miss one corpse.

It felt good to move. It would feel better to bathe, to scrub off the dried milk of the dead that crusted his skin.

Toward that end he found a swiftly flowing stream, blistering cold, and spent a quarter of the night scouring himself. He found leaves that smelled like eucalyptus when bruised and rubbed a little on the back of his wrist. When no itch developed, he brushed the rest of his body with the leaves.

He sat there, shivering a little, looking up at the stars. He could just make out Yuchagaage the Hunter on the horizon. He looked just as he did in the Steppes of the Mang where Fool Wolf had been born—half a world a way and three tens of summers ago.

Desire prickled along his belly, a sensation like a rough, ghostly tongue flicking, sharp nails scratching at his thighs. He smelled scorched hair, sour wine, and smoke-scented flesh.

The goddess that lived in his chest was waking.

We should not be here, Chuugachik purred. Her voice rattled in his chest and behind his ear. No one else could hear it.

THE GODDESS THAT LIVED IN HIS CHEST WAS WAKING.

"Well, there you are," Fool Wolf remarked. "I haven't heard from you in two full moons. What are you hiding from?"

I do not hide, sweet thing. I crouch and wait for prey. But I am no fool. I must be cautious. Something is calling me, and I cannot resist it.

"I'm well aware of that. It's my feet you use to walk with, if I'm ever foolish enough to fall asleep without having someone cage me. So why complain about where we are? It's you who brought us here."

You've been walking in daylight, the goddess accused, *without being forced. You approach our enemy on purpose.*

"Yes. If I follow the call during the day, it lets me sleep at night."

You can't capitulate!

"Believe me, I tried everything I knew," Fool Wolf replied. "But I will not spend the rest of my life tied up like a goat for slaughter every time I need to sleep. So we're going to the source of this summoning. We'll kill it if we can, and that's that."

You're following the woman, Inah.

"That too," Fool Wolf admitted, remembering Inah's green eyes, the feel of her legs wrapped around him, the scent of her obsidian hair. Inah, who was not quite human herself, who laughed at most of his foolishness. Inah, who was as much as orphan in the world as he was . . .

She betrayed you and left you to die, Chugaachik reminded him. *She went with Uzhdon, your enemy.*

"I don't think she had a choice," Fool Wolf replied. "I think she was called, too. Uzhdon certainly was. Something brought us all together and then sent us here."

That makes no sense. What would call all of us?

"You are a goddess. Uzhdon bears a god in his sword. Inah is the daughter of a python-god."

And in our traveling we have passed by, over, and under more gods than there are stars in the sky. Where are they?

Fool Wolf shrugged. "You know more about these things than I do."

Where are we?

"In the valley of Nah, Uzhdon's homeland. The call led me to a gate in a mountainside. Uzhdon and Inah already went through and left a pile of corpses outside. I was trying to figure out how to go through the gate after him when a few hundred warriors showed up, apparently from some outpost a few days march from here. I hid in the corpses."

Where does this gate go?

"Someplace they call the Strictured Land."

Yellow light flashed in Fool Wolf's skull, and he saw a desert of bones and a shining masked figure with four hounds walking before him. He felt the sharp, simple terror of a cornered animal.

Then the vision faded.

"You know this place," Fool Wolf said. "What are these dreams I'm having? What will Uzhdon find beyond that gate?"

I don't know.

"Liar."

I might have known once. Something is clouding me.

"Making you stupid, you mean?"

He got no answer to that, other than the sudden sensation of having very sharp teeth, and of wanting to use them on someone.

"Stop that," he said. "I need to think."

My clever sweet has a plan?

"Always. But it might not be a good plan. Let me think. And don't let me sleep. If we sleep-walk down to the gate, they'll cut us to bits."

A BLEARY-EYED FOOL WOLF made his way back down into the valley with dawn. Even under the circumstances, he found it beautiful. Mountains supported the heavens on all sides—raw-edged black stone clad where possible with spider bamboo, giant ferns, broad leafed evergreens, and peculiar trees that looked like troops of green monkeys clinging to poles, their furry tails curling out to form foliage. Higher, ice ruled, the tallest peaks shrouded in swirling clouds. The valley was steep-walled and very green. Cattle and goats cropped in meadows, and fields of buckwheat ruffled in a light breeze. At the far end of the valley, Fool Wolf could see the great gate, carved from the living mountain and flanked by towering monkey-faced giants of the same stone. Before it was the huge plaza where he had spent his day with the dead. Around the plaza was only meadow—no shrines or buildings, not even the little slate-roofed cottages that stood here and there in the valley.

Off to his right, two Nholish leagues distant and nestled into a narrow side valley, the golden towers of Nah glimmered fitfully in scattered shafts of sunlight. Behind the spires, mist obscured the mountains, so Nah looked like the memory of a city, floating in a dream.

Fool Wolf turned toward the Nah, hoping it was only the plaza of the gate where strangers were slain on sight. It did not take him long to run across four soldiers, clad in fringed black kilts and henna-stained leather cuirasses. They carried spears, and short swords dangled from broad belts. Their faces were generally very dark and lean, crowned with hair variously black, cream, and rust-colored.

"Stop there, stranger," one of them commanded.

"If it pleases you," Fool Wolf replied.

"What business have you in Nah?"

"I'm just a traveler, a trader of sorts," Fool Wolf told him.

"I see no pack animals, no goods. What do you trade?"

"Words. Things I've heard and know."

The soldier scrunched his brow. "This is a bad time for strangers. We've had tragedy here."

"Really? I'm sorry to hear that. Doubly sorry if it keeps me from earning a meal. A friend of mine told me I might find rest here."

"What friend was that?"

"He called himself Uzhdon, the Opal of Nah. We traveled together, for a time."

Their spears dipped toward him. "That is not a name to be said lightly," the oldest-looking of the men said, "especially in these times."

"Why is that? I assure you Uzhdon and I are friends. Take me to him, if you doubt me."

The man pursed his lips. "The Opal is not here. But I think the Rector might wish to see you, if you know anything of Uzhdon's travels."

"I was with him in Rumq Qaj, where we toppled the towers of blood, and in Pethvang, where the priests of the Sea cursed us for ending their evil rule." He did not mention that Uzhdon had been at least as interested in killing Fool Wolf on both occasions.

"Cursed?" One of the men blurted. "The Opal? That might explain—"

"Quiet, Limup," the eldest snapped. "Yes, stranger, I think the Rector would like a word with you."

"Has harm come to Uzhdon?" Fool Wolf asked, voice dripping with concern. "Nothing could bring me greater pain."

"Just come along. The Rector will explain what he pleases to you."

"Am I a prisoner?"

"Why find out?" the warrior replied. "Do as we say, and the question of your freedom will not have to be asked."

"Very well, then," Fool Wolf said. "I endeavor to be an honest man. Take me to your Rector, and I will speak. Knowing Uzhdon as I do, he would never ask me to lie or hold back."

"That's Uzhdon," the man allowed.

"What's your name?" Fool Wolf asked.

"Hoshut," the warrior replied.

AND SO THEY TOOK HIM farther down the road and through the gates of Nah, which he noticed were only leafed in gold—it was flaked, here and there, and he could see the stone beneath. That was something of a disappointment. Still, as the sun cut through the mist, the buildings caught the light and gilded it, rendering the very air lambent and precious. Fool Wolf mused, *If I scraped all of the gold from a building or two . . .*

But he had more pressing matters to consider.

Not everything was gilt, of course. Street vendors hawked wares from perfectly ordinary stalls, and the rambling houses at the edges of the city were stone with copper or slate roofs. The temple, the single largest building in the city, was remarkably plain, built of a grainy gray marble and shaped something like a gigantic wedge with the sharpest part pointed at the sky.

Within was mostly space, and priests chanting, burning incenses, poring over scrolls and books. Tall statues held up the ceiling; the bodies of men and women with the heads of beasts—dogs, mostly, and wolves, and for a moment Fool Wolf stopped in his tracks, remembering the unearthly hounds and the terrible, usually faceless master of his dreams and visions.

"Magnificent, isn't it?" Hoshut said. "It still awes me, though I've served here often. There is no finer house for the gods anywhere, eh? Have you seen better, in all your travels?"

"No," Fool Wolf replied. He did not add that he thought those who made houses for gods had too much time on their hands and no sense of proportion. Gods lived in everything—they were everywhere. In Fool Wolf's experience, building houses for them either spoiled them or drove them mad, neither of which condition was desirable in a god.

IT WAS STUPID TO CAST THREE BONES WHEN THE GAME REQUIRED A HAND OF FOUR.

Someone across the room caught his eye. A woman, seated on a bench, surrounded by children. She seemed to be speaking to them. Fool Wolf felt a weird little flutter in his chest, for he recognized her.

"Beautiful, isn't she?" Hoshut remarked. "She is the lady She'de'ng, recently come here from the faraway city of Nhol. She is a princess, there, but has come here to learn and study with our priests."

"Shouldn't we go?" Fool Wolf said. It would not do at all for She'de'ng to see him. When last he had met her, she and her lover, the sorcerer Lepp Gaz, had sworn to cut Chugaachik out of his chest—and Fool Wolf's heart along with the goddess. If She'de'ng was here, Lepp Gaz was too, for the sorcerer's soul was in She'de'ng's keeping, and he would not let her roam far. He wondered what the odds were of being able to reach She'de'ng and kill her—and thus Gaz—and still escape the temple.

Not very good, he decided. It was stupid to cast three bones when the game required a hand of four.

"Life gets better each day," he muttered, under his breath, in his own language. If all of his enemies were fingers, they were closing into a fist with Fool Wolf in the palm. What was happening here?

"What was that?" Hoshut asked.

"A prayer, in my native tongue," Fool Wolf replied. "Surrounded by such holiness, I was overcome."

She'de'ng hadn't looked up yet, but she would. Fool Wolf tried not to fidget.

"Understandable," Hoshut said. "This way."

Hoshut took him into a labyrinth of smaller rooms, and at last to a plainly furnished one, having as it did only three small wooden stools.

"Wait," the warrior told him.

A moment later, Fool Wolf found himself alone in a securely locked room.

Carnivore scents padded behind Fool Wolf's eyes, and he tasted something bitter at the back of his throat.

"Hello, Chuugachik," he told his goddess.

That was a clever plan, she said. *Walk up to the nearest warrior and ask to be taken prisoner. I wonder how long it will take Lepp Gaz to find us.*

"I didn't know he was here!" Fool Wolf protested. "Maybe he isn't. Maybe She'de'ng came here on her own."

She carries Gaz's soul tattooed on her flesh. Do you really think he would let her wander far from him?

"No. But She'de'ng didn't see us. If things work out as I planned, and I speak to the Lord Rector, he need never know

we were here."

Another silent, mocking laugh. *Unless Lepp Gaz is the Lord Rector. Certainly he is the one who called us all here.*

"I'd thought of that," Fool Wolf reluctantly admitted. "The warriors in the plaza did say something about the Rector's foreign travels."

It would fit his nature, Chuugachik said. *But—if we can kill Gaz, we can end this.*

"You're sure it's him summoning you?

Isn't it obvious? Gaz covets me. He wants to add me to the collection of souls tattooed upon his skin.

"It's more than that," Fool Wolf said. "When we first met, he knew you, and you knew him. From where? From when? How can he be powerful enough to control you?"

Chuugachik was silent for so long that Fool Wolf decided she wasn't going to answer. He began searching the cell for possible escape routes.

He is my brother, she said, finally.

"Your what?"

I thought he died long ago. I hoped he had. Now we must kill him. I think it is our only chance. If we see She'de'ng again, you must let me have your limbs.

"We'll see," Fool Wolf replied. "If Gaz is the Lord Rector, we'll never get that chance."

At that moment, a small slot in the door opened, and a pair of eyes appeared. Brown eyes, nearly black. Fool Wolf felt his blood go to ice.

"Well? Who do we have here?"

"My name is Lohar Pang, of Fanva," Fool Wolf lied. "Are you the Rector?"

"I am. You may address me as 'eminence.'"

"Yes, eminence." One or two knots untied in Fool Wolf's gut. Lepp Gaz had very pale eyes, not dark ones, and his voice was different. Of course he might be able to change his eyes and his voice. Some sorcerers could do that.

"You traveled with Uzhdon, I'm told," the Rector said.

"Yes, eminence. For more than a year."

"In that time did he behave—unusually?"

"He is the most perfectly virtuous man I have ever known." That wasn't a compliment, to Fool Wolf, but it was the truth.

"Of course. He is the Opal of Nah. But the warrior who brought you here mentioned a curse . . ."

"Yes. The priests in Pethvang cursed Uzhdon. At first, I thought they had failed, but then Uzhdon grew distant. He woke often from sleep, and I found him wandering, his eyes still dreaming. Then, one day, he and my other companion—a woman named Inah—simply left me. That wasn't like them, so I followed."

"I see. Can you tell me more of the nature of this curse?"

"No. Has Uzhdon . . . is he well?"

"He is anything but well," Rector grunted. "He has stolen the Heroq-priesthood key and opened the gate to the Strictured Land. It could well be the doom of the world."

"Why? What is this Strictured Land?"

"It was once the holiest of all lands, a land of plenty. Now it is a waste and forbidden by the great gods. The First Evil sleeps there, and the Hounds of Ash. If Uzhdon wakes them, the mountains will not hold them in. They will reap humanity like grain."

"How do you know this?"

"The heart of the Strictured land was Xotar, the Living God. The Living One awoke to Evil, and his people with him. They were an affront to the gods of sky and mountain; the hammer of the Sun smote them, and the Seven-Bearded Hawk fell on them with his claws of lightning. Those in Xotar who fought back were cursed and died with their city. Those who never succumbed to the spell of malice were led here. Then the mountains were thrown up and the way sealed. We are the chosen, the loyal. We guard the Strictured Land, and our heroes seek out the seeds of evil that scattered on the black winds when Xotar fell. Because we alone were spared, we cannot—must not—renege on our obligations."

"How do you know this?" Fool Wolf repeated.

"Because it is true," the Rector said, a bit sharply.

"Oh. In that case, you must know Uzhdon is the foe of Evil. He would never release it."

Fool Wolf was still a little shaky on what "evil" was, exactly, but he knew from experience that Uzhdon was not in favor of it.

"Not normally, no," the Rector allowed. "Our trust, these last five thousand years, has been to allow no one to open the gate. The Opal is our best, the most perfect example of what we are. If he has gone mad . . ." the Rector didn't finish the sentence.

"I'm sure this curse can't last forever," Fool Wolf said, soothingly. "Perhaps when Ilupor arrives—"

"What did you say?" The Rector snapped. Fool Wolf thought he sensed a bit of panic in his tone.

"Ilupor, Uzhdon's brother. We were to meet him here, tomorrow. He's coming on the west road."

The eyes blinked several times. "I see," the Rector murmured.

Then the eyes were gone, the slit closed again.

NOT MUCH LATER, the door opened once more, and Hoshut stood there. He had a small package in his hands.

"This is for you," he said. "It is a gold bar, payment for your service to our temple. You will be provisioned and given a mount. Then I am to escort you from the valley."

"Must I go?"

The warrior nodded, and his voice dropped very low. "The offer is more generous than you know. If you stay, it will be as a corpse."

"But Uzhdon—"

"Is no longer your concern," the warrior replied. "We are his people. The Rector knows best, and Uzhdon would agree. If you know him, you know that."

FOOL WOLF REGARDED HOSHUT, where he sat strapped to a tree.

"Not too tight, I hope?" Fool Wolf asked, mildly.

"You will regret this," Hoshut predicted.

"I would have regretted it much more if I had let you kill me," Fool Wolf said, reasonably.

"It is my duty to obey the Rector. His orders were to take you from the city and slay you quietly."

"Well, your duty has only got you tied up, rather than dead. I wouldn't complain, if I were you." Fool Wolf smiled and patted the fellow on the cheek. "Someone will happen by. Let's hope it's a kind-hearted soul."

"May you rot in the belly of Ghep."

"I'm only taking the deal you offered me," Fool Wolf replied. "I also notice, with amusement, that Uzhdon's people

are not nearly so virtuous as he."

"There is only one Opal," the warrior replied glumly, his head suddenly sagging. "Now he is lost to us. Perhaps it has made the Rector extreme. I do not question my orders, but I am glad I did not manage to kill you. It would have been dishonorable."

Fool Wolf rolled his eyes. "My greatest concern is your honor," he said. "So I'll leave you here, where there is no danger of your losing it."

As he walked off, he wondered if it was something in the water or the soil of Nah that bred such lunatics.

FOOL WOLF PEEKED over the edge of the outcropping. He had a good view, both of the five men coming up the road from the west, and of the fifteen or so hidden on the hills overlooking the road, preparing to ambush the smaller party.

It was a nice place for an ambush, and the Rector's men were taking full advantage if it, with seven men on one side of the road and eight on the other. When the newcomers were in their crossfire, they would have nowhere to hide and little chance of scaling the steep embankments before being nicely punctured. So spare was the stony ground that only a few weeds grew, much too small to hide behind.

Fool Wolf waited until the newcomers were almost—but not quite—in range of their deaths, and then hollered at the top of his lungs, "Beware, Ilupor! Treachery!"

In more-or-less the same breath, he stood and shot the ambusher nearest him. The shaft struck the Rector's man in the upper chest as he turned to see who had given them away.

Fool Wolf ducked as two red-fletched missiles sang through the rocks near him. The rest of the ambushers fired at the approaching quintet.

But too early. The range was too great, and all of the shafts fell wide. The group on the road split into two parties, three going right, two left. They scrambled up the banks—they were lower, there—and quickly found cover in the folded ridges of volcanic stone.

Fool Wolf had to duck, then—another arrow cracked on a rock a few handspans from him. He raised his bow to kill the archer as he fixed another arrow to his bow—and suddenly another attacker was there, leaping from behind Fool Wolf's ridge, curved sword cutting a slice of the sun.

Fool Wolf turned and fired, missed, and threw himself back as the blade whistled toward him.

The only sword Fool Wolf had was the one he had taken from Hoshut. It was curved, too, short and heavy. A cleaver, not a sword.

The ground gave him a good hard kick in the butt. It hurt, but he managed to roll behind another outcrop and take a few breaths. The warrior with the sword did not appear immediately, doubtless coming cautiously over the outcrop for fear of being shot. The Rector's man was in no danger of that, for the bow lay on the ground, too far away to risk running for.

Instead, Fool Wolf quickly pulled an arrow from his quiver and stuck it against his chest, as if his heart was pierced. He slumped against a rock, holding it there, and waited, eyes open and blank, tongue lolling out.

A moment later, the swordsman came around the rock and grunted in surprise. He'd been moving with prudent care, but now his back straightened, and he walked toward Fool Wolf with confidence. Fool Wolf tried not to blink or breathe.

The fellow poked him with the tip of his sword. It hurt, but Fool Wolf didn't react. Satisfied, the man stepped in for a better swing.

Fool Wolf chopped his blade around and cut the warrior's left leg half-way in two at the knee. While the fellow was still trying to take that in, Fool Wolf stood, grabbed him by the collar, and split his head down the center.

He was just finishing that when someone else came around the corner, blade flashing. Fortunately, his first opponent was in the way of the blow, and the now-corpse had another huge gash in it. Fool Wolf wrenched his blade out and got it up in time to parry the next shot at his head.

A third man, also in the Rector's livery, came over the hill to Fool Wolf's right.

He backed up quickly, knowing he couldn't go far, because there was a ravine somewhere behind him.

And then a fourth man leapt over the ridge, whooping a war-cry. His skin was dark umber, his hair a coppery red, and he bore a sword in each hand.

"Traitors!" He shouted. "Malefactors!"

Both of Fool Wolf's attackers turned at the sound, so Fool Wolf took that opportunity to chop the weapon hand off of the nearest. The man with two swords dispatched his opponent almost as quickly, then whirled on Fool Wolf. His eyes narrowed, then seemed to reflect vast surprise at something.

"You're the one who warned us!" the man with two swords said. Fool Wolf noticed he had curling lines tattooed on his forehead, just as Uzhdon had.

"I am," Fool Wolf panted.

"You're a brave man. We shall talk in a moment, when all of our cowardly foes are dealt with." With that he bounded off again.

Fool Wolf collected himself, then his bow, and followed.

> We have lost a companion, and the sacred texts say five is the luckiest number.

A SHORT TIME LATER, Fool Wolf stood on the road with the man and his three surviving companions—one of their number had taken an arrow in the eye.

"There were fifteen," Fool Wolf told the man with two swords. "I watched them hide in the rocks."

"Well, we've killed them all, then. Thank you, stranger. Ilupor of Nah is in your debt."

"I am a hundred times in debt to your brother, Uzhdon," Fool Wolf replied. "I could not allow this base treachery of the Rector to succeed."

"You know Uzhdon?"

"Indeed. We are the fastest of friends and companions."

"I am even more pleased to meet you, then. So tell me—is it true? Did the Opal of Nah really enter the Strictured Land?"

"He did," Fool Wolf replied.

"Then he must have had good reason," Ilupor reasoned, firmly. "Whatever he is up to, the Rector must not be allowed to stop him. More, I must follow him into the Strictured Land and aid him in whatever task he has set for himself. I am certain it is a noble one."

"My feelings exactly," Fool Wolf replied. "I know nothing about this Strictured Land of yours, but I trust Uzhdon's judgment. I would aid him as well."

Ilupor clapped him on the back. "Say no more. You need not prove yourself to me again. We have lost a companion, and the sacred texts say five is the luckiest number. With you, we will be five again." He lifted his chin. "The Rector sought to bar me from consulting the Sipost priests who have the second key. He failed. Let us go see what the Sipost priests have to tell us."

"The Rector sent these men to kill you," Fool Wolf reminded him. "Why won't he send more?"

"Notice how few he sent," Ilupor said, "and that the attack took place here, far from town and the sacred precincts. My guess is he sent only those men he trusted absolutely, men with more loyalty than conscience—and these were all of them. The rest he fears might be loyal to Uzhdon—and thus to me." He scratched his head. "I wonder how he even knew I was coming, or which road I was coming by? I deliberately came by the least likely way."

"Traitors aren't hard to find, I fear, even in fabled Nah," Fool Wolf bemoaned, wagging his head dolefully.

BY THE TIME THEY REACHED THE GREAT TEMPLE, they had gathered a huge crowd. Many of these were armed, and some wore the livery of the Rector. More wore hawk feathers in their hair and tattoos across their eyebrows.

"You see?" Ilupor said. "The Rector dares nothing, here."

He swept confidently up the steps of the church, then paused and turned to the crowd.

"Some say my brother Uzhdon has gone mad. I do not believe it, and neither do most of you. The sacred sword, Hukop, would never serve a madman, and yet from what I hear, he carries it still. For five thousand years, we have guarded the entrance to the Strictured Land from whence our ancestors fled. For that long we have lived here, in constant risk our souls will be devoured by the void. No one doubts that the First Evil beyond those mountains is terrible; no one doubts that its slumbering power is awful. We have born the brunt of it for lo these generations.

"I believe Uzhdon learned of a way to end the evil, to destroy the threat of the Strictured Land forever. I believe the Lord Rector tried to kill him for that—after all, what use is the Rector of a priesthood dedicated to guarding against a great evil if that evil is destroyed?"

That sent an angry mumbling around the crowd.

"When I came to take up my brother's task, to humbly request the second key to the gate from the Sipost priesthood, the Rector tried to slay me. He fears their decision!"

That drew a darker quality of growls and shouts.

"Now I go to receive that decision," Ilupor concluded. He turned to Fool Wolf. "My friend, would you do me the honor of guarding my back?

"I would indeed," Fool Wolf replied.

FOOL WOLF WAITED IN THE VAST HALL of the temple while Ilupor went into the sanctum of the Sipost priesthood. Two of Ilupor's followers stood with him.

Clever, sweet thing. Chuugachik murmured inside the chambers of Fool Wolf's heart. *Now Ilupor will take you through the gate, assuming he gets the key. That was your aim, yes? To earn his trust?*

"Yes," Fool Wolf mumbled.

Assuming that he's right, and the Rector can't summon enough men to slay him—assuming he doesn't learn that it was you who betrayed him.

"There's no prize if the dice don't fall," Fool Wolf replied.

But you're forgetting Lepp Gaz. Find the woman, destroy his soul, and our troubles will be over.

"I somehow doubt that," Fool Wolf said.

"Stand there, Lady," one of Ilupor's men commanded, staring past Fool Wolf. "We do not know you."

"One of you does," said a familiar voice.

Fool Wolf felt suddenly very tired. He felt as if he had been treading a very narrow ledge and at last found its end. He turned to regard the Lady She'de'ng of Nhol.

"What an interesting reunion this is," she said, in the language of Nhol. "Hello, Fool Wolf."

"Lady She'de'ng," he said.

"Oh. You do remember me. How flattering. Do you remember everyone you betray?"

Fool Wolf couldn't repress an acerbic laugh. "You knew I would betray you. You counted on it, Lady, and you are not the innocent you pretended to be. In the end, I helped you get what you wanted, and to repay me you would have taken my life and let Lepp Gaz have my soul."

She shrugged. "If you remember it that way."

"Where is Lepp Gaz? Surely he would not let you stray far from him."

Her eyes fell. "I would not have thought so, and yet he did. Some sorcery is at work here. Something stronger than me or Gaz."

"So you say."

Her frown deepened. "Why are you here, Fool Wolf?"

"Why are you here, Princess?"

She tossed her head back like an arrogant mare. "I was summoned," she said. "By dreams so irresistible that each night I took to walking from my quarters. Gaz could do nothing to stop them, so at last he outfitted an expedition to find the source of the summoning."

"And the summoning brought you here?"

"Yes. But our expedition was destroyed by barbarians

across the mountains. I survived and was discovered by a merchant bound for this place. He brought me here."

"You think Gaz was killed?" Fool Wolf asked.

"You know he was not. You know he cannot be, so long as I live, and his soul survives, tattooed on my flesh." She brushed her left breast, self-consciously.

"Then where is he?"

"I don't know. Perhaps some beast ravages his body each time he heals it. Perhaps he is trapped beneath the waters of the river he fell in. I know only that, in almost a moon, he hasn't found me."

"And the summoning?"

"I asked the Rector to keep me locked in my rooms, and he does so. I told him I am cursed, which must be the truth." Her eyes hardened. "Now I've told you why I came here. You owe me the same."

"I came hoping to steal some of the gold from these buildings," Fool Wolf said.

She looked skeptical. "But instead you've decided to help some local warrior in his holy struggle against the Rector?"

"I grew bored."

"That's nonsense. What do you take me for? You were summoned here, too, weren't you? You've also had the dreams of the hounds, the great city, the terror. I'm sure this hero of theirs, this Uzhdon, had the same dreams. Something beyond those mountains wants us. All of us."

"I am sorry, princess, but I've no idea what you mean."

Anger contracted her cold face into a scowl. "Why lie to me? We must be allies in this. A common enemy afflicts us."

"Princess, I'll remind you once more—last time I sought to help you, it nearly ended in my death, and you would have been pleased. Do not plead with me."

"I—" but she turned to stare.

Ilupor had just staggered from the doorway to the Sipost precincts. He was bleeding heavily from a cut to his forearm.

"Blasphemy!" He moaned. "The priests were all dead, and assassins in their place! The key was gone! The Rector has broken the sacred laws!"

"Ilupor, you are wounded!" One of his men cried.

"It is an ant-bite," the warrior said. "I must speak to the people. When they hear—when they see what the Lord Rector has done, they will know it is not my brother who is mad, but he."

ILUPOR HAD FOUR HUNDRED MEN with him by the time they reached the plaza of the gate. The Rector's men were waiting, in nearly even numbers. The two leaders faced each other across a space no greater than a weak man might throw a stone.

"You have sinned, Rector," Ilupor shouted. "All here know it. You took the Opal of Nah prisoner, then you tried to kill him. You tried to kill me, too, in cowardly ambush, and you slayed the Sipost priests when they would not give you the key—the key you need to pursue and slay Uzhdon."

"This is madness!" The Rector shouted back. "Our sole purpose is to keep anyone—even our own Opal—from treading the sands of the Strictured Lands. Don't you fools know your Tesoths? 'When the living tread the shattered bricks of Xotar, then grins the first Evil and wakes.' What matter that it is Uzhdon?"

"What matter? Yet you would go there."

"Wait!" The Rector held up is hands. "A moment! First, I did not slay the Sipost priests, or cause them to be slain! I, like you, courted their favor, and I think they were disposed to give it to me."

"You lie!" Ilupor said.

"I do not! Furthermore, my only aim in entering the Strictured lands is to stop Uzhdon before it is to late."

"I trust my brother before I trust you! The Opal of Nah is righteous, while you have proven yourself a sinner. Give us the key!"

"If I had the key, wouldn't I have already gone through the gate?"

"This is some sort of trick!"

THE RECTOR'S EYES SUDDENLY LIT ON FOOL WOLF, AND RECOGNITION FLASHED THERE. THAT COULDN'T BE GOOD.

The men around Fool Wolf were at fever pitch. He could actually smell their fury and fear.

When did you steal the key and murder the priests? Chuugachik asked. *Clever, but I don't remember.*

"It wasn't me," Fool Wolf replied, pursing his lips tightly.

Then who?

Fool Wolf shook his head. "I don't know."

The Rector's eyes suddenly lit on Fool Wolf, and recognition flashed there. That couldn't be good.

Fool Wolf launched himself at Ilupor.

"Watch out!" he shouted. "A murderer's arrow!"

Ilupor went down under Fool Wolf's weight, but before they even hit the stone, the mob was in motion, sweeping toward the Rector's men like a tide. No one seemed interested in whether some hidden sniper had actually tried to kill Ilupor or not; in a heartbeat all reason was gone from the field.

Ilupor bounced up. "Once again I owe you my life, friend," he shouted. "Come, fight by my side!"

This was the messy part of Fool Wolf's plan, and he hated it. He despised fighting. He especially loathed pitched battles, where cleverness, agility, and skill were poor shields against the chaos of death all around. He might normally slink off or

pretend to be wounded, but in this case he had to take the risk. He had to go through that gate with Ilupor. Ilupor had to trust him, and he would only trust a warrior.

So he fought, and hated it, and was happy that it was over soon. The Rector's men collapsed under the assault, and the Rector himself fell with an arrow in his throat. More than half of Ilupor's mob died as well, and before the sun set again, the plaza of the gate was as Fool Wolf had first found it—a corpse garden.

But in that tumult and confusion, Fool Wolf did see something interesting. He saw Ilupor stoop over the dying Rector, and Ilupor had a dull green something in his hand. He pushed his hand into the Rector's robes and brought it out empty. Then he drove his right-hand sword straight into the Rector's heart.

Later, Ilupor produced the key to the gate from the Rector's dead body, before all of the survivors of the battle.

It was jade, a little larger than a man's palm, and Fool Wolf wasn't surprised.

Nodding to himself, Fool Wolf slipped off, hoping that in the hysteria the Temple and the Heroq-rite shrine had been left unguarded.

"AH, THERE YOU ARE!" Ilupor said. "Where have you been all night?"

"Cleansing myself," Fool Wolf replied. "It's a custom of my people, after battle—to avoid the sickness that vengeful ghosts can bring."

"Ah. You must tell me more of this custom some day. But didn't you sleep?"

"I did not."

"Are you fit to travel with us?"

"I am."

And so, a bit later that morning, Ilupor opened the gate with the key of jade.

The expedition consisted of Ilupor and thirty warriors, Fool Wolf—and She'de'ng.

"She is a foreign princess, somehow cursed by the Strictured Land," Ilupor confided. "The Rector was keeping her prisoner."

"But should we take her with us?" Fool Wolf asked. "Won't it be dangerous for her?"

Ilupor considered, stroking his chin. "It is all part of some puzzle," he said. "My brother, this princess, the insanity of the Rector. She's willing to go, and I think we should take her."

Fool Wolf shrugged. "It's your expedition. Do you know what we will find?"

"A long tunnel through the dark. Many traps to stop the unwary." He paused. "There is a problem, there. Uzhdon seems to have taken the Heroq-rite book detailing the various pitfalls in the tunnels. We must brave them even so."

"I am ready for that," Fool Wolf assured him.

THE LIGHT OF DAY DIED behind them, and soon they had only the fire goddess to guide the way. They advanced cautiously for what seemed a very long time, until at last they reached a narrow stone bridge, spanning what might as well be a bottomless cavern.

"That looks like a good place for a trap," Fool Wolf observed.

"Indeed it does," Ilupor agreed. "A trap that can survive five thousand years could not rely on trip-cords and such. It's mechanisms must be all of stone, or worked by some little god."

"Let me cross first," Fool Wolf said. "I am acquainted with this sort of thing."

"That's generous, but this is not your fight," Ilupor replied. "One of my men will try it."

"Uzhdon is my friend," Fool Wolf said. "I insist that the honor be mine."

"Do you?" Ilupor said, a suspicious note in his voice. Fool Wolf wasn't looking at him, but he heard the faint wisping of a sword coming free from its scabbard.

Fool Wolf ran as swiftly as his feet would take him. As he set foot on the stone bridge, an arrow hissed by his ear, but he set his mouth and kept running, eyes down, counting stones by torchlight. When his foot hit the fourteenth stone, he felt it sag and click. He threw the torch ahead and leapt with all of his might.

The bridge groaned and fell to pieces, and he hit the far lip of the ravine with one foot. He tottered there a moment, until the impact of an arrow striking his shoulder gave him the final nudge to fall forward and not back. He closed his teeth on the pain, and rolled for cover.

"Stop firing!" Ilupor commanded. "He has the book! He must have taken it from the Heroq-rite shrine."

Fool Wolf groped for the arrow and found it wasn't there—it had struck his scapula and rebounded. "That's very well reasoned," he shot back, in the language of Nhol. "Well reasoned indeed, Lepp Gaz."

That echoed in the ravine for a moment, followed a moment later by She'de'ng's mocking laughter.

"When did you know?" Gaz replied, still in Ilupor's voice.

"Always," Fool Wolf said. That wasn't true—he hadn't known until he saw "Ilupor" secret the key upon the Rector.

"You're very clever, then. My disguise fooled even his own men. I have Ilupor's soul, after all, and thus all he knew."

"What are you up to, Gaz? What is waiting for us in the Strictured Land?"

"Everything. You're an idiot to fight me, Fool Wolf. We should be allies."

"I'll judge that for myself when I know more," Fool Wolf told him.

"Give me the book. I can still forgive you."

"How generous," Fool Wolf said. "But I don't have it anyway. I couldn't read it, after all, though the illustrations were clear enough. I memorized the diagrams and burned it." He darted forward and snatched up the torch. His wound, however shallow, was really starting to hurt. It wouldn't do to faint here.

"Good luck with the rest of your journey," Fool Wolf shouted back. "The bridge-trap was just the first of many. There are much more inventive snares ahead."

Ignoring the sorcerer's howl of frustration, Fool Wolf turned and hurried down the tunnel, deeper—toward the Strictured Land.

I think you have doomed us both, Chuugachik murmured, in the deep of his bones.

"I was doomed the moment I took you as my spirit helper," Fool Wolf told the goddess. "If I'm to die, I'm only too happy to take you with me."

He continued through the darkness, ignoring the goddess's curses.

Vs. Sorcerers

TAKING OUT THE MAGIC MISSILE MACHINE

by James Wyatt

"Sorcerers? They are not real wizards, and their shortcomings are their downfall."
—Mialee

Enemy spellcasters can be an adventuring party's most dangerous foes—especially when protected by loyal minions. When it comes to minions, you're on your own (or see earlier articles in this series for tips on fighting goblins, orcs, zombies, and other foes). But there's a lot you can do to prepare yourself for fighting a spellcaster—particularly a sorcerer, whose spell repertoire is limited but whose sheer destructive power is often unrivaled.

Preparation

So you want to specialize in hunting sorcerers? Here are some ways to focus your character on that dangerous mission.

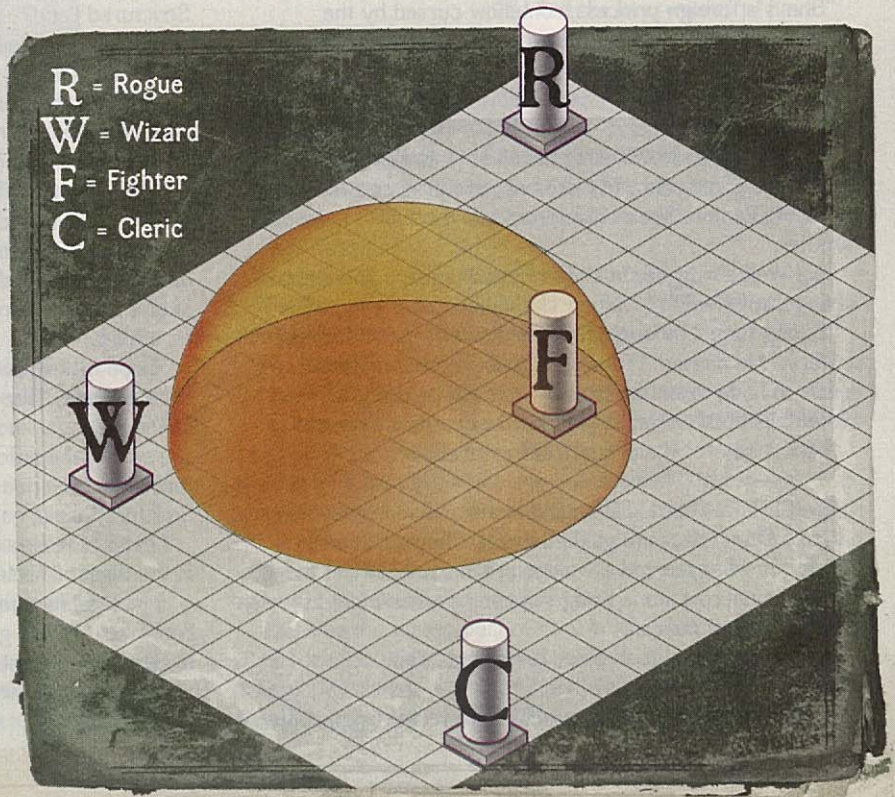
Do whatever you can to improve your saving throws, particularly your weaker ones. As you advance in levels, the disparity between your "good" and your "bad" saves widens dangerously (unless you're a monk and have no "bad" saves). When making a saving throw that you're good at against a sorcerer of about your level who is casting the best spell he can muster, you always have about a 50% chance of success, even without a good ability score modifier. If the saving throw required is not your strong one, that chance drops dramatically as your level gets higher, from 40% at 1st level down to 15% at 20th. The addition of the save-boosting feats (Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, and Iron Will) can help narrow that gap significantly. Since most of a sorcerer's dangerous spells are likely to require Reflex saves (generally Evocations like *fireball* and *cone of cold*), Lightning Reflexes is never a bad choice, even if Reflex is your good save. Watch out for nasty Enchantments (like *hold person*) that require Will saves, and Necromancy spells like *finger of death* and *wail of the banshee* that call for Fortitude saves. A *cloak of resistance* has the excellent benefit of improving all your saving throws.

Note that one of the things that makes a sorcerer most dangerous is that he can always cast at least three spells per day of the highest level he has available (plus any bonus spells from his Charisma ability). A wizard, by contrast, has at most two spells (plus bonus spells) of her highest level available per day. So when you're fighting a sorcerer, you really need to worry about those tough saving throws.

Tactics

There he is! The initiative dice are rolled, and you can already see him pulling out his material components. Now what?

Close Fast: Sorcerers have all sorts of means at their disposal to kill you from a distance. *Fireball, ice storm,* and similar spells work at long range, which means a 12th-level sorcerer can blast you with chain lightning from 880 feet away without any loss of accuracy. Sure, your archer can fire her longbow that far, but with a -16 attack penalty for range. Never underestimate the benefits of spells (potions, wands, scrolls) like *fly* and *expeditious retreat* to help you close those distances fast. Just don't run up in a group . . .



Spread Out: Many offensive spells have a 15- or 20-foot radius of effect, or they affect multiple targets "no two of which can be more than 30 feet apart." Don't give a sorcerer an easy target. Keep all the members of your party spread out—at least 30 or 40 feet away from each other—until you close for melee. If you encounter the sorcerer at long range, send a fighter straight down the middle (with some magic to enhance his speed), put the cleric and the rogue on opposite sides, and let the wizard straggle behind with long-range spells (or counterspells) at hand.

Stay far enough apart, and even a *fireball's* radius won't get more than one of you.

Ready Actions: Once your fighter is in melee with the sorcerer, he can ready an attack on the sorcerer if he starts casting a spell, possibly preventing him from getting a spell off while the rest of the party advances. The problem with this approach is that you can only ready a partial action, which means a higher-level fighter gives up his multiple attacks. Once the rest of the party has closed to melee range, the fighter is better off using all the attacks he has available to take the sorcerer down. Readying actions to disrupt the sorcerer's spellcasting might still be worthwhile for the rogue, whose attacks might otherwise not be as effective (although if she gets multiple attacks and she's flanking the sorcerer, she should maximize her sneak attack damage by using all her attacks). Don't rely too heavily on readied actions to disrupt spellcasting, though. A smart sorcerer will have maximum ranks in Concentration, which means he'll get the spells off even if he takes damage while casting.

Hold Him: Grappling a spellcaster can be a very effective means of preventing him from casting spells. While grappled, a character can only cast spells with a casting time of 1 action, no somatic components, and material components or focus items he already has in hand. A wizard might be able to sidestep these restrictions by having a key spell or two prepared with the Still Spell metamagic feat, but a sorcerer can't use that tactic: applying a metamagic feat to a spontaneously cast spell increases its casting time to a full round, violating another restriction. That leaves a limited number of spells to worry about. These spells are: *blindness/deafness, dimension door, flare, lesser geas, mass charm, Otto's irresistible dance, polymorph self,* the power word spells, *shout, suggestion, teleport, wail of the banshee,* and *wish.* A *dimensional anchor* can be a good preparation for grappling a sorcerer.

A druid or ranger with an animal companion that boasts the improved grab special ability (like a lion, bear, tiger, or their dire counterparts) can provide an even more effective grappling attack, since an animal typically deals more damage while grappling and thus makes spellcasting more difficult. The same types of creatures can be summoned with *summon monster* and *summon nature's ally* spells.

Silence: The *silence* spell can nearly shut down a sorcerer, since spells with no verbal component are even more rare than spells with no somatic component. It is difficult to pin a sorcerer down to the area of a *silence* spell, however: Casting it directly on the sorcerer or an item in his possession allows him a Will save that is likely to be successful, and casting it on a point in space or another object allows him to simply move out of the area . . . unless he's grappled. *Silence* in conjunction with grappling can be a great offense, since it completely prevents the sorcerer from casting spells.

SAVING THROW DCS AND BONUSES

Sorcerer Level	Best Spell Level	Average Charisma	Save DC*	Opponent Saves**
1	1st	15	13	+2/+0/+2
2	1st	15	13	+3/+0/+2
3	1st	15	13	+3/+1/+3
4-5	2nd	16	15	+4/+1/+3
6-7	3rd	16	16	+5/+2/+4
8	4th	17	17	+6/+2/+4
9	4th	17	17	+6/+3/+5
10-11	5th	17	18	+7/+3/+5
12-13	6th	18	20	+8/+4/+6
14	7th	18	21	+9/+4/+6
15	7th	18	21	+9/+5/+7
16-17	8th	19	22	+10/+5/+7
18-19	9th	19	23	+11/+6/+8
20	9th	20	24	+12/+6/+8

* The Save DC column lists the DC for the highest-level spell the sorcerer can cast, assuming the Charisma score listed in the Average Charisma column.

** The Opponent Saves column lists saving throw numbers for a character of the same level as the sorcerer. The first number is the character's "good" save (Reflex for rogues, Fortitude for fighters, Will for wizards, and so on). The second number is the character's "bad" save. The third number is the "bad" save augmented by the appropriate feat (Great Fortitude, Lightning Reflexes, or Iron Will).

VS. SORCERERS: HELPFUL TIPS

- Saving throws can save your life (hence the name).
- You know (or can guess) what spells he knows, so prepare to counterspell.
- Don't let him blast you from 800 feet away.
- Don't stand so close to each other, or one *fireball* will hurt you all.
- Use readied actions to disrupt spellcasting . . . unless a full attack is significantly better, or he's making all his Concentration checks.
- Grappling is bad news for him . . . an animal with improved grab is worse.
- Silence is the spellcaster shutdown. Grapple him to keep him in the area, and you'll have no more spells to worry about.

The Adventures of VOLO

LOST TREASURES OF CORMYR, PART 3

by Ed Greenwood · illustrated by Ron Spencer

Volothamp Geddarm, at your service, gentles, setting truths of Faerûn before you like coins being hurled in a golden shower over the shoulder of a dwarf at work with his hammer, stamping coins out of soft gold. This day I write of another pair of lost treasure tales gleaned from the records of the great kingdom of Cormyr.

THE HARP OF HEALING

Debate still rages in scholarly Cormyrian circles as to whether the Forest Kingdom once either lost a great magic in the form of a harp that could heal those who touched it while it played by itself, or narrowly won freedom from a great evil.

Aubleth Crownsilver
(989 DR–1066 DR)
An always-laughing, stout-hearted hero of the knights of Cormyr, Aubleth was for some years the youngest member of King Arangor's elite Griffon Guard (an order of griffon-riding knights who acted as the eyes, envoys, and battle-commanders for the king). His lance later helped claim the life of Thauglor,* the last great dragon to hunt in Cormyr.

Aubleth was clean-shaven, wore his blond hair shoulder-long, was inclined to fat, and had amber-hued eyes. He was a close friend of Gardrath Roaringhorn; of the two, Aubleth was more the quick-tongued prankster and wit.

Gardrath Roaringhorn
(984 DR–1019 DR)
A tall, thin knight of the Griffon Guard, Gardrath helped to slay the dragon Thauglor with his close friend Aubleth. He was very much a noble in behavior and sentiments, and he had raven-black hair and piercing blue eyes that darkened noticeably when he was angry or amorous.

> He was found dead the next morning under the corpses of six of the beasts.

Gardrath's valiant service raised his family (the clan was considered noble in Waterdeep*) to ennoblement in Cormyr. He's still remembered in Purple Dragon barracks lore for his brave death: When a fever put Gardrath on his deathbed in the harsh winter of 1019, he put on his best boots, took down his best sword, and went out to hunt wolves. He was found dead the next morning under the corpses of six of the beasts.

Lareth Huntsilver
(996 DR–1059 DR)
A slender, sardonic blade of the court, Lareth befriended Halartan Wyvernspur when the latter arrived at court. When they went drinking together, Lareth's droll observations often had Halartan sputtering and snorting strong drink through his nose.

Lareth had ash-blond hair and a thin moustache, was debonair, and had a

deft way with the ladies at court, often romancing several at the same time.

He ended his days happily married to an innkeeper's daughter of common birth, Roatha Ildraen, as the Seneschal of the now-vanished road-fort of Turnstone.[3]

Aiken Wyvernspur
(1008 DR–1082 DR)
The son of Lord Gerrin Wyvernspur, Aiken had dark brown hair and eyes, a slim build and short stature, and a quiet, loyal nature. A shrewd investor and builder, Aiken solidified the family fortunes by building homes and shops in Suzail.

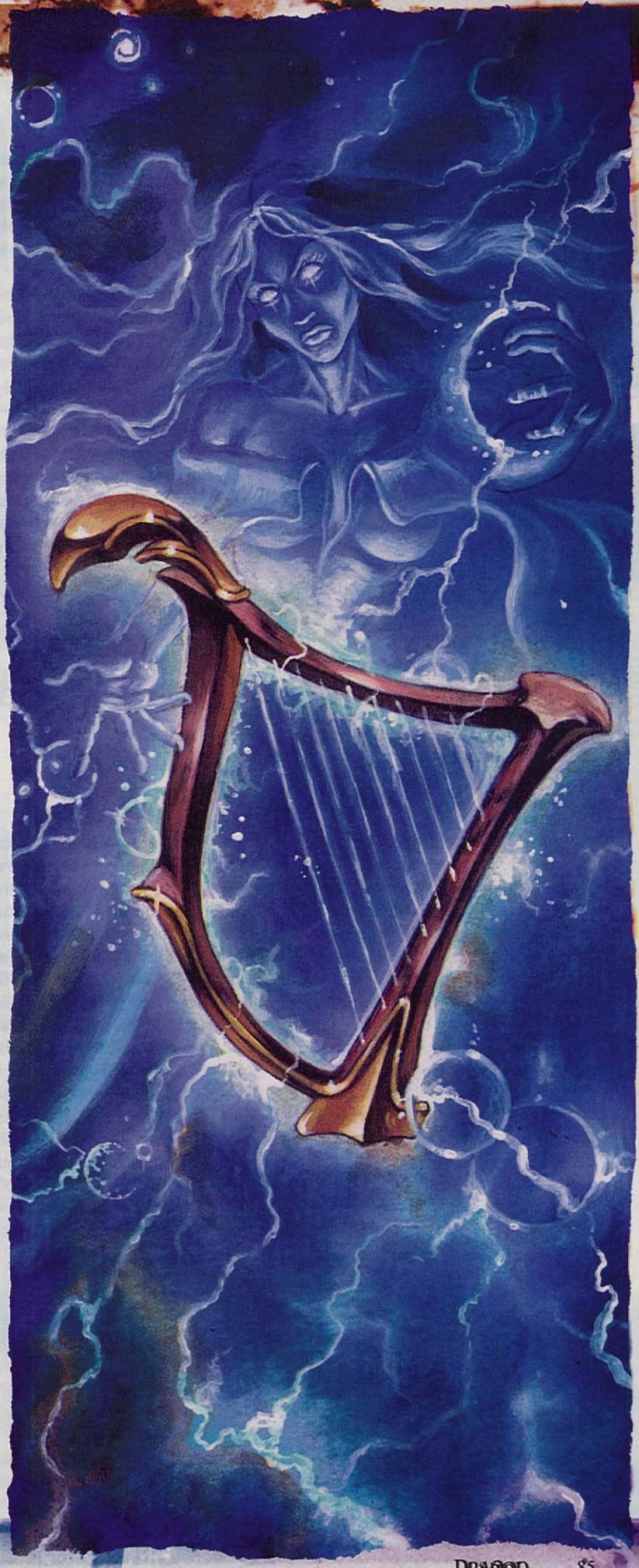
THE HARP THAT PLAYED BY ITSELF

At a roadside inn north of Suzail, not long after the slaying of the great dragon Thauglor, four men walking home from a night of revelry chanced upon a strange and eerie scene: In a glade just off the road, a radiance softer than firelight glowed. It proved to be coming from a floating harp whose strings were moving as if plucked by unseen hands. Diseased and maimed commoners were crawling or staggering from the trees up to it, touching it, and striding away seemingly cured. Suddenly vigorous and tall, they hurled aside crutches and shawls, laughed and shouted in joy, and ran off into the forest.

The four men on the road were all courtiers: Aubleth Crownsilver, Lareth Huntsilver, Gardrath Roaringhorn, and Aiken Wyvernspur. They were men not given to wild tales, nor were they unused to taking much drink.

The commoners seemed to melt out of the trees and run back into them, and this seemed suspicious to the four—as did the existence of the harp itself, unheard of and yet within an easy stroll of the walls of Suzail. The courtiers' duty was clear: Such a magic had to be investigated and given into the custody of the crown. The four moved into the clearing and seized the harp—whereupon the commoners melted away like smoke, both the frail and the joyous, leaving the harp lightless and silent in their hands.

The four took the harp straight to the Royal Court and presented it to the war wizard on duty. In the days that



followed, much magic was laid upon them and on the harp, trying to learn the truth about its origin and powers.

The conclusions were as follows: For unknown reasons, the harp would fall silent and remain so whenever any of the four men were within about six paces of it, but otherwise would glow, levitate to about chest-height (which was as they'd first seen it), and play tunes that no one in Suzail could identify.

Those who touched it spoke of warm feelings and the banishment of any pain from which they were suffering—but unlike the commoners seen by the four, injuries and afflictions did not pass from the bodies of such persons and their pains soon returned.

One war wizard of the time, Thamaeler Mornalar, advanced his suspicions that the harp cast magics on the minds of those who touched it directly (that is, with their bare skin) while it was playing—magics that seemed to sleep but remain in their thoughts.

When spells were cast to cleanse and banish all magics from those who'd touched the harp, many of them reacted with momentary rage and brief but frenzied attacks on folk around them. The frenzy ceased as the magical cleansing took effect.

Aubleth Crownsilver hadn't been given to sleepwalking before the appearance of the harp, but on a night some months after he helped bring it to Suzail, he burst into the room where it was kept, striking senseless both a doorguard and a war wizard whilst in his sleep, and tried to tear the harp apart with his bare hands.

Wild harp music resounded throughout the Royal Court, carrying to impossible distances and arousing many. Guards and war wizards burst into the chamber to find a translucent apparition of a robed human woman—presumably a sorceress, of rather plain countenance but burning, intent eyes—standing in the air above the harp. Lightning crackling from her hands seemed to be simultaneously reassembling the shattered harp and draining the life from the writhing Aubleth. When hastily hurled spells interrupted this process, the apparition glared at them, then vanished—with the harp.

> The harp would levitate and play tunes that no one in Suzail could identify.

The woman wasn't seen again, but the harp appeared in many places around Cormyr all through that night, flashing into existence whilst playing loudly and vanishing as quickly. Its music aroused many who'd touched it on previous occasions to rise from their beds and attack others, go to saddle horses, walk purposefully to particular places, and so on. Affected people soon ceased performing their acts, and those so ensorceled had no knowledge of why they'd undertaken such actions or how they'd reached their present locations.

The wasted, withered Aubleth Crownsilver recovered his health completely, but he never remembered anything of his actions or any other events of that evening.

The Harp of Healing has, according to tavern and fireside tales, been seen from time to time around Cormyr ever since, though more recent sightings have been few and separated by decades or entire generations. Many folk say it's a sign of the favor of the gods towards Cormyr, a hope to the injured and afflicted of the realm.

Thamaeler held rather darker conclusions and insisted that his thoughts be recorded in both court records and the annals of the Brotherhood of Wizards of War. He felt that the harp was a device used by a powerful wizard or wizards unknown to bring the minds of many Cormyrians under their magical control for some future purpose probably hostile to the realm or at least to the rule of the Obarskyrs.

Some war wizards believe the sorceress was Thayan, still others that she serves an exiled noble family, the Cult of the Dragon, the Zhentarim, or a Sembian conspiracy; all such beliefs, it must be remembered, are sheer speculation.

Most common folk of Cormyr believe the Harp of Healing is a good thing that was sent by the gods and that the crown attempted to seize for itself—but which by the grace of the gods who sent it escaped, to wander Cormyr playing by itself.

To this day, pranksters, brigands, and rogues often play harps at night to try to draw folk into the forest. Such music brings war wizards and Purple Dragons alike to full and wary alertness. They are likely to deal less than gently with such harpists they apprehend.

ELMINSTER'S FOOTNOTES

1. In full, as dragons style such things, "Thauglorimorgorus, the Black Doom." As for Volo's foolish comment about the "last great dragon to hunt in Cormyr," know ye that such words are a beckoning horn-call to dragons everywhere to descend on the fair Forest Kingdom in fury, just to prove Volo wrong—as if such proof were needed.

2. This is true, though blood relations no longer seem—if they ever were—any measure of common cause, loyalty, looks, or behavior. The Roaringhorns in both places are known for a certain lusty boldness, one might say; others have termed it "recklessness," "boorish impetuosity," and worse. Mind that ye do not confuse the Roaringhorns with the Rallyhorns; duels get started that way.

THE BLACKSTONE GHOST

These same four friends were involved in another matter of lost treasure soon after finding the Harp of Healing: the haunted manor of Blackstone and its missing owners and wealth.

Blackstone stood on the west bank of the Starwater River atop a high, rocky ridge on the inside of the great curve where Starwater turns to rush down to the sea. The same ridge is visible today as an otherwise bare, sheep-grazed hill topped only by a Purple Dragon lookout tower. In those days, a thick wood cloaked the ridge, and Blackstone—today only a shrub-choked dell of tumbled stones, where the manor collapsed into its own cellars—rose like a black, many-fingered hand among them.

Blackstone was the seat of the Theresparin, a swiftly-rising family of weavers and landowners most known to their fellow Cormyrians for their large herds of sheep.

There came a day when the fussy, careful-over-details head of the house, Naronder Theresparin, failed to appear at a long-awaited meeting with court officials. Then other appointments were missed, and it dawned on authorities and neighbors that none of the Theresparin—or their servants—had been seen for some days.

Mindful of their experiences with the Harp (and its aftermath, wherein their eager cooperation surprised him), the king sent Aubleth Crownsilver, Lareth Huntsilver, Gardrath Roaringhorn, and Aiken Wyvernspur to investigate.

They found Blackstone utterly empty—stripped to the walls, with no sign of life. The only sign of death was a huge bloodstain, such as could only have been made by the shed life-blood of many humans or lesser numbers of larger creatures. This stain covered most of the floor of the grand, ornately-balconied feast hall.

The four courtiers explored Blackstone from top to bottom, even to its drains, cellars, and roofs (murderers in those days had begun to leave bodies on rooftops for carrion birds and the weather to dispose of), but found nothing more. Two of them stood guard while the other two fetched war wizards to try spell-searching the emptiness.

They, too, found nothing. The Theresparin, their servants, and all the furnishings and riches[4] of their house—even to the horses and fodder in the stables—had disappeared, never to be seen again. To this day, no one knows what became of them, though for everyone but those who dwelt near, the tale soon faded into an oddity of the past.

> It dawned on authorities and neighbors that none of the Theresparin had been seen for days.

Whispers about Blackstone being haunted were born of what befell the four courtiers after their first day of searching. They decided to remain in the house and sleep in watches, suspecting that brigands in the woods might have stripped the house—and just might return to search its walls for secret passages and the like, perhaps having tortured information out of captives as to the whereabouts of secret hiding places.

No brigands appeared, but the four courtiers did hear a tremulous woman's voice whispering nigh their ears. No visible person was speaking. Their blades passed through where such a person should have been. It said such things as, "Gone, all gone away," and, "Elven work, without a doubt."

Lareth Huntsilver alone heard another voice, male, this time, speaking dreamily or uncaringly: "The blood calls them down. There is no escaping them." and, much later, "Watch for the sword that turns into a pegasus. She who bears it can break the gates."

Who these ghostly speakers were, and what they meant, can only remain a matter of conjecture—for two nights after the four heard these voices (and a night after war wizards had scoured Blackstone as thoroughly as they knew how), the manor house burned like a torch despite being almost bare stones inside and out, blazing away with a blistering heat that almost melted its walls. Shortly before morning, it collapsed into the state in which it lies today—and in later years was reclaimed by the crown, who awaits the possible return of the vanished Theresparins.

3. Turnstone, know ye, stood on the east side of Calantar's Way north of Immersea. Lareth made himself quite a fortune and reputation raising swift and beautiful horses there, and selling them to all who passed by—including me. He had three little daughters, rough-and-tumble spitfires as I recall; they pelted me with apples for fun, so I enspelled three little spheres of water out of the horse pond—one to drench each tousled little blonde head. Collect such memories, mind ye, as ye go through life; that remembered moment is all that's left of those lasses now.

4. These were estimated by their scribe-of-accounts at the time to muster over 80,000 gold coins, plus several times that in gems and trade-bars, hidden or stored in a dozen places that he knew of.

ELDRITCH MASTER

by Monte Cook · illustrated by Dennis Cramer

"Speak not of the eldritch masters, for their ways are mysterious and dangerous. Taught by creatures most would never dream of speaking with, they live their lives in a realm higher than that of other mortals. But do not envy them, for they often pay a great price for their power."

—The Book of the Pale

Eldritch Master

The eldritch master is usually spoken of in whispers, for many have heard the legends that you cannot speak the name of one without her knowledge. Eldritch masters have an unnerving aura about them, as well as a stare that can freeze you in your tracks.

Most eldritch masters are sorcerers, but sometimes bards take up the mantle. To join their elite ranks, a character must contact and make a pact with a powerful outsider or other magical creature such as a lammasu, celestial, fiend, slaad, lich, hag, rakshasa, or titan.

As NPCs, eldritch masters are usually loners, occasionally taking on a single disciple or aide. They never join guilds or other such organizations, and often avoid the company of arcane spellcasters altogether.

Class Features

Weapon and Armor Proficiency: Eldritch masters are proficient with no weapons, armor, or shields.

Spells Known: These are bonus arcane spells (see the *Player's Handbook*, Chapter 12) known to the character, gained as a sorcerer gains new known spells. These are not bonus spells added to the total number that the character can cast. The character must already cast spells as a sorcerer to benefit from these extra spells known (such as a sorcerer or bard). A character cannot benefit from bonus spells known if she cannot cast spells of that level.

Detect Magic: At will, the eldritch master can *detect magic* as a spell-like ability. This ability duplicates the effects of the spell *detect magic* cast at the eldritch master's level.

Combined Levels: Add the character's eldritch master levels to the levels of any other arcane spell casting class he has when determining the level-based effects of spells. For example, a 7th-level sorcerer with three levels of eldritch master casting a *fireball* spell inflicts 10d6 points of damage with a range of 800 feet. This is an extraordinary ability.

True Spell: An eldritch master gains the ability to select one spell known to

THE ELDRITCH MASTER — HIT DIE D4

Level	Attack Bonus	Fort. Save	Ref. Save	Will Save	Special	Spells Known 1	2	3	4	5
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	*Detect Magic*, Combined Levels	+3	-	-	-	-
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	True Spell (0th)	+2	+2	-	-	-
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Metamagic feat, Spell boost	-	+2	+2	-	-
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Spell Dilettante	-	-	+2	+2	-
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	True Spell (1st)	-	-	-	+2	+2
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Powerful Presence, Metamagic feat, Spell boost	+3	-	-	-	-
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	True Spell (2nd)	+2	+2	-	-	-
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Knowing Stare, Spell Dilettante	-	+2	+2	-	-
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Metamagic feat, Spell boost	-	-	+2	+2	-
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	Mastered Name	-	-	-	+2	+2

REQUIREMENTS

To qualify to become an eldritch master, a character must fulfill all the following criteria.

Knowledge (arcana) ranks: 8
Spellcraft ranks: 6
Diplomacy ranks: 2
Intimidation ranks: 2
Spellcasting: Must be able to cast arcane spells
Special: The eldritch master must have made a pact or bargain with some powerful, otherworldly entity. In exchange for teaching the character the ways of the eldritch master, the entity must be rewarded with a special task, a great (magical) treasure, or some special payment determined by the DM.

her to be a "true spell." The eldritch master can cast this spell once per day in addition to the normal number of spells the he can cast in a day. At 2nd level, the eldritch master can select one 0-level spell. At 5th, she can select one 1st- or 0-level spell. At 7th, she can choose a 2nd-, 1st-, or 0-level spell. Once the spell is chosen, it cannot be changed. This is a supernatural ability.

Metamagic Feat: At 3rd, 6th, and 9th level, the eldritch master gains one free metamagic feat.

Spell Boost: At 3rd, 6th, and 9th level, the eldritch master gains the ability to cast a spell one level higher than his current highest level spell once per day. The eldritch master also gains a single spell known for that level if he does not otherwise know any spells of that level. For example, a 7th-level sorcerer who gains three levels of eldritch master can cast one 4th-level spell per day, and he gains a new spell of 4th level that he knows. A 5th-level sorcerer who gains three levels of eldritch master gains the ability to cast one additional 3rd-level spell per day, but gains no additional spells known because he already also gained +2 3rd-level spells known at that same level.

CLASS SKILLS

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int mod

The eldritch master's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are:

Alchemy (Int)
Concentration (Con)
Craft (Int)
Diplomacy (Cha)
Intimidate (Cha)
Knowledge (any) (Int)
Listen (Wis)
Profession (Wis)
Scry (Int)
Sense Motive (Wis)
Spellcraft (Int)
Spot (Wis)

See the *Player's Handbook* Chapter 6 for skill descriptions.

Spell Dilettante: At 4th level, the eldritch master can choose one other character class whose spell list she can choose from when selecting new spells that are known to her as she gains levels. At 8th level, she can select a second such class. Once a class has been chosen, it cannot be changed. Even if the character class chosen is divine in nature, the spells count as arcane for the eldritch master. This is a supernatural ability.

Powerful Presence: The eldritch master gains +2 to Diplomacy and Intimidate checks. Once per day, as a standard action, she can force all living beings within a 30-foot radius to make a Will save (DC 10 + eldritch master class levels + Charisma bonus) or suffer a -2 morale penalty on attacks, saves, and skill checks for 1 round/eldritch master level. This is a supernatural ability.

Knowing Stare: Once per day, the eldritch master can invoke a 30-foot gaze attack that *holds* all living creatures. Those affected must make a Will saving throw (DC 10 + eldritch master class levels + Charisma bonus) or be *held* for 1 round/eldritch master level. This is a supernatural ability.

Mastered Name: Upon reaching 10th level, an eldritch master can sense when another being speaks her name. When this occurs, the eldritch master knows the exact location and the name of the speaker. She is free to ignore such knowledge, retaining the details for when they seem significant. This awareness is sufficient to allow the eldritch master to *scry* on the individual as if he had just met the speaker (DC 10). It does not convey enough information to allow the eldritch master to immediately *teleport* to the speaker's location, though such information could be gathered through other magical means, including scrying. D

Invaders of the Barrier Peaks

by James Jacobs • illustrated by Ron Spencer

Almost a hundred years ago, a unique event took place in the depths of the Barrier Peaks: A technological marvel, a starship, crashed into these remote mountains. This starship was from an unknown source, and its crew had succumbed to a terrible viral outbreak. The separate modules of the ghost ship drifted in space for unknown years; one of them is the section that crashed in the Barrier Peaks.

This event triggered a massive landslide that buried the ship under hundreds of tons of rock. For several decades, this technological wonder remained hidden and buried until an earthquake exposed it once again. Automatic safety features had engaged during the crash, shutting down robots and placing the surviving lifeforms in stasis until they could be rescued; the earthquake triggered the same systems and awakened the denizens within the ruined ship. Over the next several years, these denizens slowly began to spread outward into the surrounding wilderness.

Before long, the strange creatures reached the nearby Grand Duchy of Geoff. The Grand Duke hired many adventurers and sent them into the Barrier Peaks in hopes of curtailing the invading beasts. The ruined ship was soon discovered, and the relics and technological wonders made several adventurers rich and powerful. The location then became a popular but dangerous attraction.

Unknown to the many adventurers who scoured the Barrier Peaks over the last several years, a second crashed module lay hidden nearby. During the ship's travels through space, the crew discovered a small planet that orbited a highly radioactive star. The planet was dominated by hot, humid swamplands teeming with life. But the planet's sun was dying, and the crew of the ship decided to rescue many of the planet's indigenous life forms and preserve them in the name of science. Robots were sent to the surface to gather specimens, which were then placed in stasis aboard the ship. The crew's plan was to find a stable planet onto which they could transplant the creatures safely. Unfortunately, such plans were doomed when the crew succumbed to the virus.

When this second module of the ship crashed in the Barrier Peaks, the robots flew into action. They quickly determined that the surrounding region was inhospitable to their biological refugees, so they proceeded to terraform a large valley to match the steaming, radioactive fens found on the creatures' homeworld. Large machines were built to moderate the weather in the valley and encourage constant rainfall and cloying warmth; other machines were installed to replicate the presence of radioactive ores. Before long, the denizens were brought out of stasis and introduced into their new environment where they began to thrive. When the earthquake struck the region and reactivated the first crashed module, this second module was buried under a massive rockslide. The robots were cut off from their work and decided to shut themselves and the module down to conserve power. It has remained untouched since then, and it could provide a wealth of unplundered technological wonders for a brave party. Unfortunately, to reach these ruins one must first navigate the dangerous radioactive swamp constructed by the robots.

Dozens of plants and animals were introduced into this artificial swampland. The original homeland's star did not give off visible light; the world was one of darkness and radiation. As a result, these creatures have evolved many different ways to hunt and live without normal sight and in the presence of deadly radiation. The plants of the region draw their sustenance from the radiation in the air rather from sunlight; thus they lack chlorophyll and appear in various pasty shades of white, yellow, brown, or pale pink. The dominant foliage in the region is a strange plant similar to a pale yellow palm tree covered with shaggy fur.

In most cases, the animals of the region are fairly small and harmless. Strange and pallid, they mostly resemble insects and amphibians; the majority are vegetarians that are naturally skittish of creatures of Medium-size or larger. However, there are four notable exceptions . . .

Note: All four of these creatures possess a radiation-based special attack or special quality that has "radiation" or "radioactive" in the ability's title. The article assumes the creature is encountered in an area of high radiation that allows it to absorb enough energy to "power" the ability. If encountered outside of such an area (such as outside of the terraformed valley in the Barrier Peaks), these powers are not available to the creature. As an alternative, DMs can rule that these special attacks and qualities are magical in nature and do not require radiation to function; if such is the case, these attacks and qualities all become supernatural rather than extraordinary abilities.

The bonetree is a particularly horrible form of carnivorous plant that subsists on the various minerals found in bones. Like the other plants in the region, it draws much of its sustenance from the ambient radiation in the valley. It has also developed an efficient method of extracting additional nourishment from prey, both living and dead, allowing it to grow much larger than the other plants of the region.

A bonetree is a swamp-dwelling plant. It is similar to a mangrove plant in that its trunk is bulbous and lumpy and its thick nest of roots is mostly above ground. Dozens of spindly branches grow out of the top of the trunk, but its sides are barren save for hundreds of knots and jagged holes the size of an apple. The tree's bark is pale brown and its branches are leafless. For a short period of time after feeding, a bonetree can grow thick bony plates and spurs over its body to aid it in attack and defense.

A typical bonetree is 25 feet tall. Although its growth slows after reaching this height, a bonetree continues to grow its entire life. A well fed bonetree can live for hundreds of years and reach heights of 100 feet or more.

Combat

When a bonetree senses prey, it begins to rattle its branches in anticipation. This creates an unnerving sound that resembles a nest of rattlesnakes.

Stinging Vines (Ex): Seconds after a bonetree senses prey, a writhing forest of stinging vines whip out of the numerous holes that dot its trunk. These vines flail about to a range of 30 feet, attacking any creature in range. A bonetree can attack all such creatures in range at the same time, but it can make only one attack roll per target. The bonetree can even attack targets underwater or behind cover (though the AC bonus for the target's cover applies).

Poison (Ex): Anyone struck by the bonetree's stinging vines must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 20). If the saving throw fails, the character takes 1d6 points of temporary Dexterity damage. A second save must be made 1 minute later to avoid 1d6 points of secondary Dexterity damage and paralysis.

Constitution Drain (Ex): Once it has paralyzed a victim, the stinging vines automatically attach to the victim. The vines quickly extrude a nest of tiny filaments that worm their way into the flesh of the victim and begin to exude a horrible enzyme that dissolves bone while leaving surrounding tissues intact. This process drains 1 point of Constitution each round following the round in which the vine latched on to the victim. These feeding filaments are quite fragile and cannot be used against a mobile creature. Removing the filaments from a paralyzed or otherwise helpless victim requires an opposed Strength check and is a move-equivalent action.

Blindsight (Ex): A bonetree has no visual organs but can ascertain all foes within 120 feet using sound-, scent-, and vibration-detecting organs. Bonetrees can even detect creatures underwater.

Bonegrowth (Ex): Once a bonetree has drained at least 3 points of Constitution from a victim or victims, it can "sweat" a foul-smelling mixture of liquefied bone and enzymes from its body as a free action. This layer of sweat hardens into interlocking bony plates in a single round, raising the bonetree's natural armor bonus from +4 to +8 on the bonetree's next action after it has drained the third point of Constitution.

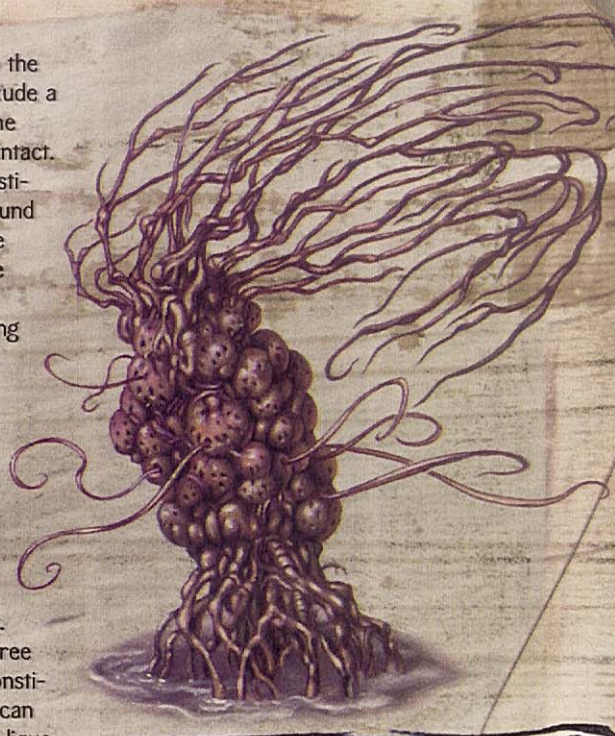
Once a bonetree has drained 6 points of Constitution, it can grow razor sharp bony spurs out of its stinging vines; the spurs fall off after 10 minutes (at which time the bonetree gathers them up to eat them), but until they do so the bonetree's stinging vines deal 3d4 points of damage on a successful hit.

The bony exoskeleton degrades at the rate of 1 point of natural armor bonus per hour until it is completely reabsorbed by the tree.

Radioactive Flash (Ex): A bonetree's trunk is charged with energy. When it is struck forcefully, this energy is released in a flash of blinding light. Each time a bonetree is struck for damage, the attacker must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 15) or be blinded for 1 round. Those standing at least 30 feet away gain a +4 bonus to this saving throw. The flash's maximum range is 60 feet.

Creatures in the vicinity can also avert their gaze from the bonetree to avoid this effect (see pages 8-9 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information).

Plant: Immune to mind-influencing effects, poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, and polymorphing. Bonetrees are not subject to critical hits.



Bonetree

Huge Plant

Hit Dice	11d8+55 (104 hp)
Initiative	+0
Speed	0 ft.
AC	12 (-2 size, +4 natural)
Attacks	Stinging vines +8 ranged
Damage	Stinging vines 1d4 and poison
Face/Reach	10 ft. by 10 ft./30 ft. (with stinging vines)
Special Attacks	Stinging vines, poison, Constitution drain
Special Qualities	Blindsight, bonegrowth, fire resistance 10, radioactive flash, plant
Saves	Fort +12, Ref +3, Will +3
Abilities	Str 10, Dex 10, Con 20, Int —, Wis 10, Cha 2
Feats	Multiattack
Climate/Terrain	Warm marsh
Organization	Solitary or grove (2-8)
Challenge Rating	5 (4 if encountered outside an area of high radiation)
Treasure	1/10 coins; 50% goods; 50% items
Alignment	Always neutral
Advancement	12-16 HD (Huge); 17-32 HD (Gargantuan); 33+ HD (Colossal)

A ragewing is a small, insidious breed of flying predator that has the ability to heal itself by absorbing the life force of nearby creatures, as well as drive them into a murderous frenzy.

The ragewing's body is a tangled mess of feelers, tendrils, and strange sensory organs between a large pair of batlike wings. Two dozen spindly legs trail below its body, and a long rat-like tail with a triangular fin at the tip trails behind. The neck of the creature is long and bald, and its head is like that of an eyeless lamprey with three large white mandibles surrounding rows of rasping teeth.

Although most ragewings are rather small (with a wingspan of 3 feet), there is a variant that dwells in large bodies of water. These giant ragewings seem to have lost their hivemind abilities and are always encountered alone. They use their wings to swim and cannot fly. The largest aquatic ragewings reach lengths of over 25 feet, with wingspans of 65 feet or more.

RAGEWING

Small Aberration

Hit Dice	1d8+2 (6 hp)
Initiative	+3 (Dex)
Speed	20 ft., fly 40 ft. (good)
AC	16 (+3 Dex, +1 size, +2 natural)
Attacks	Bite +3 melee
Damage	+8 ranged Bite 1d6-2
Face/Reach	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks	Empathic bond, incite rage, radiation pulse
Special Qualities	Blindsight, fire resistance 10, hivemind, wound transfer
Saves	Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5
Abilities	Str 6, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 2, Wis 16, Cha 19
Feats	Weapon Finesse (bite)
Climate/Terrain	Warm marsh
Organization	Solitary, brood (2-5), or swarm (5-20)
Challenge Rating	3 (2 if encountered outside an area of high radiation)
Treasure	None
Alignment	Always neutral
Advancement	2-3 HD (Medium-size); 4-9 HD (Large aquatic); 10-20 HD (Huge aquatic)

Combat

The ragewing is not a physically powerful creature. If hard pressed, it can bite an aggressor. Its primary method of hunting is insidious. A ragewing has the ability to telepathically bond with another living creature; they use this bond to send victims into fits of rage that force the victim to attack nearby creatures. Once the dust settles, the ragewing settles down on the kills to feed.

Blindsight (Ex): A ragewing has no visual organs but can ascertain all foes within 120 feet using sound-, scent-, and vibration-detecting organs. Ragewings cannot detect other creatures in the water unless the ragewings are moving in it.

Empathic Bond (Su): As a standard action, a ragewing can attempt to create an empathic bond with a single living creature within 30 feet. The target can resist the attempt with a successful Will saving throw (DC 14). Once the ragewing has established an empathic bond with a creature, it can maintain the bond indefinitely as long as it remains within 30 feet of the victim. If the ragewing is ever more than 30 feet away from the target, the bond is broken, though it can be reformed if the ragewing comes back within range. A creature who successfully saves is immune to this ability for one day.

Note the the presence of the bond does not change the target's feelings of hostility toward the ragewing. There is a 50% chance that a ragewing is accompanied by a bonded creature (suitable to the ragewing's environment) when it is encountered.

Incite Rage (Su): A ragewing can incite rage in a creature it has formed an empathic bond with. The bonded creature can resist the rage if it makes a Will saving throw (DC 14). Inciting the rage is a full-round action for a ragewing. A creature that succumbs to the rage perceives all creatures within 60 feet of itself as enemies, and it attacks them immediately with whatever weapons it has available. Note that this includes the ragewing, which often hides or flies out of reach of an enraged creature to protect itself. If the ragewing moves more than 30 feet away, however, the bond is broken and the rage ends prematurely without further side-effects.

An enraged creature cannot use skills or abilities that require patience and concentration, such as moving silently or casting a spell. The victim can use any feats he might have except Expertise, item creation feats, metamagic feats, and Skill Focus (if it's tied to a skill that requires patience and concentration). Finally, the character cannot activate magic items while in the rage. This rage lasts for a number of rounds equal to 3 plus the victim's Constitution modifier. After the rage ends, the victim is fatigued (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 84).

Radiation Pulse (Ex): The ragewing continually absorbs ambient radiation. When it is excited or threatened, it flushes the radiation it has absorbed. This expulsion takes the form of a pulse of visible light. A ragewing can emit a pulse once per hour. Any living creature within 15 feet of a ragewing when it does this must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 14) or become dazzled, suffering a -1 penalty to all attack rolls for 1 hour.

Sightless creatures are immune to the ragewing's radiation pulse.

Hivemind (Su): A group of at least five ragewings within 60 feet of each other can join their minds together as a free action to form a single acting mind that allows the ragewings in the swarm to act in a coordinated manner against enemies. This grants a ragewing in the

group a +2 dodge bonus to its Armor Class if it and at least four other ragewings participating in the hivemind can see the attacker (and thus anticipate the attack). A ragewing gets a +2 competence bonus to attacks against any creature that at least four other ragewings in the hivemind can see. Ragewings that have established an empathic bond with another creature cannot join in a hivemind.

Wound Transfer (Su): The most amazing ability a ragewing possesses is the ability to heal wounds by siphoning the life force of a bonded creature into itself. Any ragewing that is struck for damage that has an active empathic bond can transfer that damage to its bonded creature. For example, a ragewing bonded to a treeleg strangler is struck by a razortail's tail attack. The tail attack does 5 points of damage, but since the ragewing is bonded with the treeleg strangler, the strangler suffers the 5 points of damage and the ragewing escapes unharmed.

Each time a ragewing makes use of this power, the bonded creature receives a new Will saving throw (DC 14) to break free of the bond; otherwise the damage is transferred, but the link is lost. A ragewing can only transfer an amount of damage equal to its current hit point total. Thus, a ragewing with 3 remaining hit points can only transfer 3 of the points of damage it suffers in the following rounds to the creature it has bonded.

The razortail is a savage, feral predator that lurks in the shallow waters of swamps and bogs. A full-grown razortail is about 6 feet long. It looks somewhat like a pale yellow salamander with a finned tail and four long, spindly legs ending in webbed feet. The head is dominated by a many-toothed vertical mouth. Its tail splits into four powerful flukes, each of which ends in a nest of razor-sharp claws. The razortail glows from within with a dull red pulse that seems to match its heartbeat.

Razortails' metabolisms are incredibly high; they must constantly hunt for food in order to fuel their bodies and will eat their own weight in prey each day. Razortails are asexual and generally give birth to a brood of a dozen or so live young once a week. They grow to maturity in less than a week and die of old age after a couple of months.

Razortails are often encountered in packs led by an exceptionally large member of the species. Despite their appearance, they are intelligent and coordinate their attacks to take full advantage of terrain. They are fond of flanking their prey during attacks.

Combat

A razortail prefers to attack with a flurry of swipes from its clawed tails, but it doesn't hesitate to make biting attacks if the opportunity presents itself. Although not that strong, they are fast swimmers and prefer to take advantage of this fact by preying on land-based creatures in shallow water.

Bloodfrenzy (Ex): The scent of fresh blood drives a razortail into a crazed frenzy. If any creature within 30 feet of a razortail is wounded with a piercing or slashing weapon, the razortail becomes frantic with hunger and gains a +2 morale bonus to its attack and damage rolls. (Note that creatures without blood, such as constructs, elementals, oozes, plants, undead, and creatures in gaseous form, don't trigger the bloodfrenzy when injured.) It also obtains the ability to take an additional partial action each round. The bloodfrenzy persists for 3 rounds, after which the razortail becomes fatigued (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 84). A fatigued razortail cannot enter a blood frenzy.

Radiation Beam (Ex): A razortail absorbs radioactive energy at a phenomenal rate; this is, in fact, the source of its unusual glowing qualities. Once per minute, as a standard action, a razortail can redirect its stored radioactivity into a narrow beam of intense heat. This beam is emitted from its mouth and has a range of 50 feet. The razortail must make a ranged touch attack (it has a +6 bonus to ranged attacks) to hit a single target with this beam. Any creature hit by the beam takes 3d6 points of fire damage.

Blindsight (Ex): A razortail has no visual organs but can ascertain all foes within 120 feet using sound-, scent-, and vibration-detecting organs. Razortails can detect other creatures whether they are in or out of the water.

Fast Healing (Ex): A razortail's rapid

RAZORTAIL

Medium-sized Beast

Hit Dice	2d10+2 (13 hp)
Initiative	+5 (Dex)
Speed	30 ft., swim 40 ft.
AC	15 (+5 Dex)
Attacks	4 tails +3 melee, bite -2 melee
Damage	Tail 1d4+2, bite 1d8+1
Face/Reach	5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.
Special Attacks	Bloodfrenzy, radiation beam
Special Qualities	Blindsight, fast healing 3, fire resistance 10
Saves	Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +1
Abilities	Str 14, Dex 20, Con 12, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 14
Skills	Listen +3, Move Silently +5
Climate/Terrain	Warm marsh
Organization	Solitary or pack (3–12)
Challenge Rating	2 (1 if encountered outside an area of high radiation)
Treasure	None
Alignment	Always neutral
Advancement	3–6 HD (Large)

Treeleg Strangler

Huge Aberration

Hit Dice	10d8+50 (95 hp)
Initiative	+3 (-1 Dex, +4 Improved Initiative)
Speed	30 ft.
AC	16 (-1 Dex, -2 size, +9 natural)
Attacks	2 claws +12 melee, 8 tendrils +10 melee
Damage	Claw 2d6+7, tendril 1d4+3
Face/Reach	15 ft. by 15 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks	Improved grab, constrict, radiation manipulation, strangulation
Special Qualities	Blindsight, camouflage, fire resistance 20
Saves	Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +9
Abilities	Str 24, Dex 8, Con 20, Int 2, Wis 11, Cha 11
Skills	Hide +18, Move Silently +14
Feats	Improved Initiative, Multiattack
Climate/Terrain	Warm marsh
Organization	Solitary
Challenge Rating	8 (7 if encountered outside an area of high radiation)
Treasure	Standard
Alignment	Always neutral
Advancement	Range: 11-16 HD (Huge); 17-30 (Gargantuan)

metabolism affords it rapid healing. It heals 3 points of damage per round as long as it has at least 1 hit point. If reduced to 0 hit points or less, its healing rate drops to 1 point of damage per hour until it reaches 1 hit point again.

A treeleg strangler is a terrifying beast that lurks in densely vegetated sections of the swamps of the Barrier Peaks, where it ambushes prey who unknowingly walk nearby.

The egg-shaped body of a treeleg strangler is about 6 feet across. Moss-like hair hangs down in tangled patches from the body, and eight pale pink tendrils dangle from the underside. These tendrils can be retracted into the beast's body when it is hiding. A small mouth filled with tiny, serrated teeth gapes at the center of these eight tendrils. The beast's five legs are 6 inches thick and spider-like; these legs are about 30 feet long and colored to resemble tree trunks. Each leg ends in a long ivory spike surrounded by a dozen grasping talons.

The treeleg strangler is a patient predator that can wait for many days for unsuspecting prey to come near. They are nearly silent when they move or attack, and the sight of one of these huge predators moving with ghostly grace through a swamp is unnerving.

Combat

A treeleg strangler generally finds an area of dense vegetation to set up its ambush point. It plants the spikes of its five legs deep in the surrounding bogland and elevates its body into the overhead canopy to hide. Its legs resembling nothing so much as a grove of trees. When a creature walks beneath it, the strangler attacks quickly, dropping its body down out of the foliage overhead so it can reach the victim with its tendrils. Once a strangler has a victim in its clutches, it either tries to pin the unfortunate beneath one of the shallow pools that dot the swamps the creature calls home, or it loops its tendrils around the throat of the victim and strangles it. The strangler can defend itself by uprooting two of its legs to slash at attackers.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the treeleg strangler must hit with its tendril attack. Each tendril can make a separate grapple attack, so victims often find themselves forced to break the holds of 2, 3, or even 4 tendrils before they can get free of the creature. Once a strangler has a victim grappled, it begins to strangle the creature (see below). Sometimes, however, it tries to pin the creature (see page 137 of the *Player's Handbook*) if there are pools of shallow water nearby, so as to drown the creature and end the fight quickly. (The DM can assume that there is a 50% chance that the grappled character is standing in such a pool. See page 85 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for information on drowning.)

A tendril's AC is 16, and a successful hit against a tendril that deals at least 8 points of damage severs it. A treeleg strangler can regrow severed tendrils in an hour.

Strangulation (Ex): If a treeleg strangler manages to grab a victim with its tendrils, it begins to strangle the victim. This attack is a constricting attack that deals 2d6+7 points of damage.

Radiation Manipulation (Ex): A treeleg strangler can store radioactive energy in its body. As a free action, the strangler can use this energy to wither and sicken creatures within 30 feet. Each round, all living creatures in this area must make a Fortitude saving throw (DC 20) or suffer 1d3 points of temporary Constitution damage. The treeleg strangler can maintain this area of radioactivity for 1d4 rounds before exhausting its energy, after which it must wait for one day before using the power again.

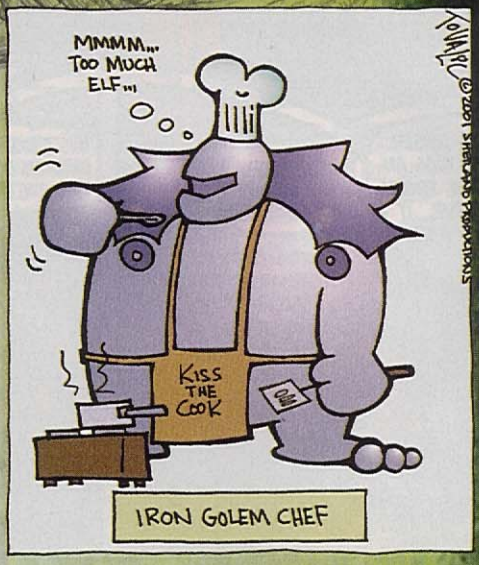
Blindsight (Ex): A strangler has no visual organs, but it can ascertain all foes within 120 feet using sound-, scent-, and vibration-detecting organs. Stranglers can even detect other creatures in water within range.

Camouflage (Ex): It takes a successful Spot check (DC 20) to recognize the strangler as a creature instead of as four tree trunks.

Dragon Mirth

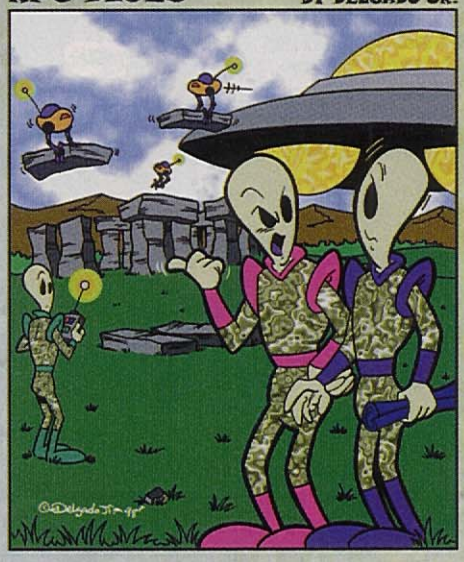
THE UNSPEAKABLE OAF

by John Kovalic



RPG BLUES©

BY DELGADO JR.

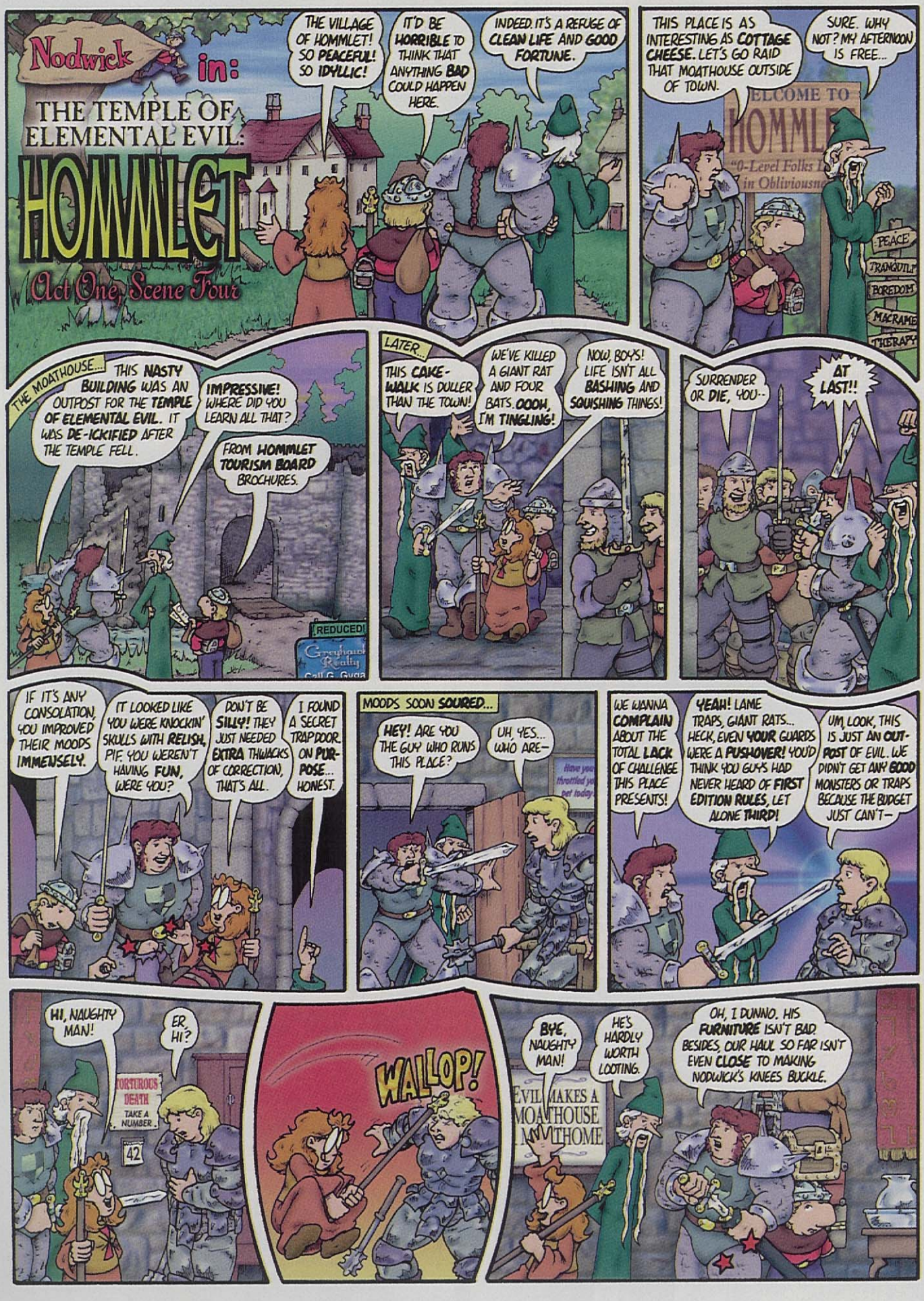


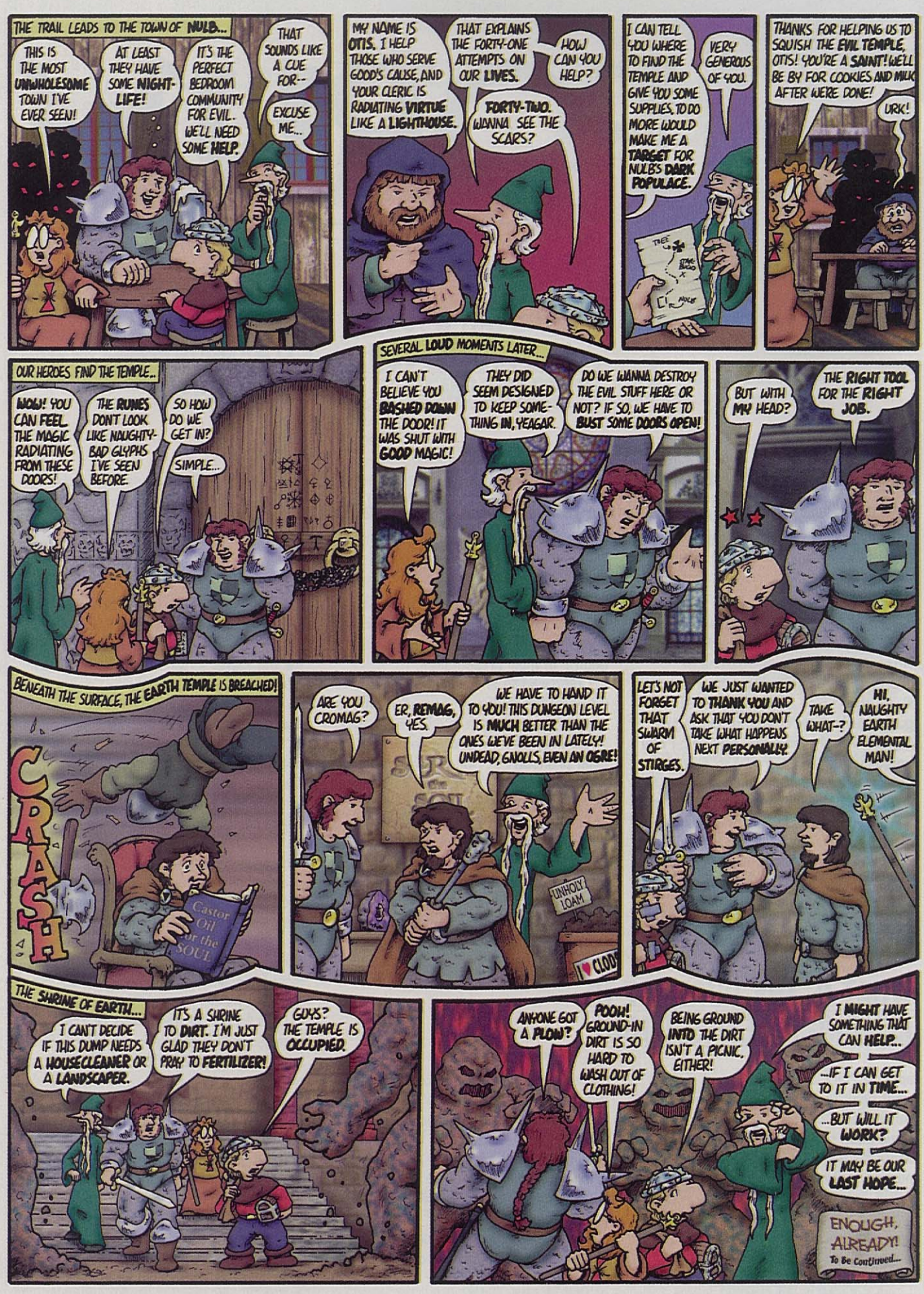
PETER DELGADO JR.

"ME!?! I thought you knew what we were building it for!"

"So, when you converted to the new edition, did the lines come with it or did you have to get those separately?"

TONY MOSELEY


Nodwick in:
THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL:
HOMMLET
Act One, Scene Four
THE VILLAGE OF HOMMLET! SO PEACEFUL! SO IDYLLIC!
IT'D BE HORRIBLE TO THINK THAT ANYTHING BAD COULD HAPPEN HERE.
INDEED. IT'S A REFUGE OF CLEAN LIFE AND GOOD FORTUNE.
THIS PLACE IS AS INTERESTING AS COTTAGE CHEESE. LET'S GO RAID THAT MOATHOUSE OUTSIDE OF TOWN.
SURE. WHY NOT? MY AFTERNOON IS FREE...
PEACE
TRANQUILITY
BOREDOM
MACRAME
THERAPY
THE MOATHOUSE...
THIS NASTY BUILDING WAS AN OUTPOST FOR THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL. IT WAS DE-ICKIFIED AFTER THE TEMPLE FELL.
IMPRESSIVE! WHERE DID YOU LEARN ALL THAT?
FROM HOMMLET TOURISM BOARD BROCHURES.
REDUCED!
LATER...
THIS CAKE-WALK IS DULLER THAN THE TOWN!
WE'VE KILLED A GIANT RAT AND FOUR BATS. OOOH, I'M TINGLING!
NOW, BOYS! LIFE ISN'T ALL BASHING AND SQUISHING THINGS!
SURRENDER OR DIE, YOU..
AT LAST!!
IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, YOU IMPROVED THEIR MOODS IMMENSELY.
IT LOOKED LIKE YOU WERE KNOCKIN' SKULLS WITH RELISH, PIF. YOU WEREN'T HAVING FUN, WERE YOU?
DON'T BE SILLY! THEY JUST NEEDED EXTRA THWACKS OF CORRECTION, THAT'S ALL.
I FOUND A SECRET TRAPDOOR. ON PURPOSE... HONEST.
MOODS SOON SOURED...
HEY! ARE YOU THE GUY WHO RUNS THIS PLACE?
UH, YES... WHO ARE—
WE WANNA COMPLAIN ABOUT THE TOTAL LACK OF CHALLENGE THIS PLACE PRESENTS!
YEAH! LAME TRAPS, GIANT RATS... HECK, EVEN YOUR GUARDS WERE A PUSHOVER! YOU'D THINK YOU GUYS HAD NEVER HEARD OF FIRST EDITION RULES, LET ALONE THIRD!
UM, LOOK, THIS IS JUST AN OUTPOST OF EVIL. WE DIDN'T GET ANY GOOD MONSTERS OR TRAPS BECAUSE THE BUDGET JUST CAN'T—
HI, NAUGHTY MAN!
ER, HI?
TORTUROUS DEATH
TAKE A NUMBER
42
WALLOP!
BYE, NAUGHTY MAN!
HE'S HARDLY WORTH LOOTING.
EVIL MAKES A MOATHOUSE A HOME
OH, I DUNNO. HIS FURNITURE ISN'T BAD. BESIDES, OUR HAUL SO FAR ISN'T EVEN CLOSE TO MAKING NODWICK'S KNEES BUCKLE.


THE TRAIL LEADS TO THE TOWN OF NULB...
THIS IS THE MOST UNWHOLESOME TOWN I'VE EVER SEEN!
AT LEAST THEY HAVE SOME NIGHT-LIFE!
IT'S THE PERFECT BEDROOM COMMUNITY FOR EVIL. WE'LL NEED SOME HELP.
THAT SOUNDS LIKE A CUE FOR--
EXCUSE ME...
MY NAME IS OTIS. I HELP THOSE WHO SERVE GOOD'S CAUSE, AND YOUR CLERIC IS RADIATING VIRTUE LIKE A LIGHTHOUSE.
THAT EXPLAINS THE FORTY-ONE ATTEMPTS ON OUR LIVES.
HOW CAN YOU HELP?
FORTY-TWO. WANNA SEE THE SCARS?
I CAN TELL YOU WHERE TO FIND THE TEMPLE AND GIVE YOU SOME SUPPLIES. TO DO MORE WOULD MAKE ME A TARGET FOR NULB'S DARK POPULACE.
VERY GENEROUS OF YOU.
THANKS FOR HELPING US TO SQUISH THE EVIL TEMPLE, OTIS! YOU'RE A SAINT! WE'LL BE BY FOR COOKIES AND MILK AFTER WE'RE DONE!
URK!
OUR HEROES FIND THE TEMPLE...
WOW! YOU CAN FEEL THE MAGIC RADIATING FROM THESE DOORS!
THE RUNES DON'T LOOK LIKE NAUGHTY-BAD GLYPHS I'VE SEEN BEFORE.
SO HOW DO WE GET IN?
SIMPLE...
SEVERAL LOUD MOMENTS LATER...
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU BASHED DOWN THE DOOR! IT WAS SHUT WITH GOOD MAGIC!
THEY DID SEEM DESIGNED TO KEEP SOMETHING IN, YEAGAR.
DO WE WANNA DESTROY THE EVIL STUFF HERE OR NOT? IF SO, WE HAVE TO BUST SOME DOORS OPEN!
BUT WITH MY HEAD?
THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE RIGHT JOB.
BENEATH THE SURFACE, THE EARTH TEMPLE IS BREACHED!
CRASH
Castor Oil or the SOUL
ARE YOU CROMAG?
ER, REMAG, YES.
WE HAVE TO HAND IT TO YOU! THIS DUNGEON LEVEL IS MUCH BETTER THAN THE ONES WE'VE BEEN IN LATELY! UNDEAD, GNOLLS, EVEN AN OGRE!
UNHOLY LOAM
I ♥ CLOD
LET'S NOT FORGET THAT SWARM OF STIRGES.
WE JUST WANTED TO THANK YOU AND ASK THAT YOU DON'T TAKE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT PERSONALLY.
TAKE WHAT--?
HI, NAUGHTY EARTH ELEMENTAL MAN!
THE SHRINE OF EARTH...
I CAN'T DECIDE IF THIS DUMP NEEDS A HOUSECLEANER OR A LANDSCAPER.
IT'S A SHRINE TO DIRT. I'M JUST GLAD THEY DON'T PRAY TO FERTILIZER!
GUYS? THE TEMPLE IS OCCUPIED.
ANYONE GOT A PLOW?
POOH! GROUND-IN DIRT IS SO HARD TO WASH OUT OF CLOTHING!
BEING GROUND INTO THE DIRT ISN'T A PICNIC, EITHER!
I MIGHT HAVE SOMETHING THAT CAN HELP...
...IF I CAN GET TO IT IN TIME...
...BUT WILL IT WORK?
IT MAY BE OUR LAST HOPE...
ENOUGH, ALREADY!
To Be Continued...

FORUM

forum@wizards.com
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Include your full name and mailing address.
We'll withhold your name or print
your full address if you wish.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

How closely do you adhere to the printed rules in your games? What are some of your favorite house rules?

Voice of Reason

I was reading through *Dragon* #278, and I happened to notice the letter from Adam C. from Tuscon, Arizona in "Forum." For some reason, his remarks about the choice of non-gendered language in the new edition of D&D just begged a reply from me. You see, I feel uniquely qualified to reply to Adam's complaints for a number of reasons: I've been playing RPGs long enough now to have seen four versions of D&D introduced; I teach writing for a living, so I deal with gendered language regularly; I do academic studies of gender issues; and, I just happen to be a woman.

I could spend a lot of time being sarcastic and cutting about Adam's apparent lack of understanding about what point of view is (for the record, Adam, both "he" and "she" represent the same point of view: third person) or about his understanding of what gender neutrality entails. (Also for the record, Adam, current rhetorical theory recommends a number of possible ways to approach non-biased, non-gendered language, and one of them includes alternating the recognizably gendered pronouns—she and he—by sentence, paragraph, or section.) But, the truth is the new *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* are remarkably gender neutral in their presentation.

Compared to 2nd Edition, with its insulting "Note About Pronouns" where among other things the editors insisted "Centuries of use have neutered the male pronoun . . ." the new edition is remarkably balanced in its presentation of gender. For the entire disclaimer, check page 8 of the 2nd Edition *Player's Handbook*, and keep in mind that when 2nd Edition was written in 1989, there had been more than twenty years of debate on the inherent negativity of assuming "he" represented a neutered word. The very fact the editors chose to make a "note about pronouns" proved they knew that the pronoun choice they had made would alienate part of their prospective audience, and they did it anyway. But I'm not here to rehash old problems; I'm actually here to defend Wizards of the Coast and the new edition's books.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF ISSUING A NEW EDITION?

The fact is that the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Player's Handbook* are written primarily in second person (that's using the forms of "you" for those of you who have forgotten your grammar lessons). Second person, by its very nature, is gender neutral. The only way I could find for the *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* to be read as "mixing" points of view is for Adam to assume that the only possible definition of "you" is "he." From my reading, the editors did not mix up their gender presentations. The times when the gendered pronouns are actually used are in an appropriately balanced fashion. When the subject of an example is feminine, the editors use "she"; when the example is male, they use "he." When the subjects of examples are not definitively named to identify their sex, the pronouns were alternated by paragraph or example—a perfectly acceptable, even encouraged format to make their audience inclusive rather than exclusive.

Let's face it, in these days of dropping demographic numbers for the RPG world in general, Wizards of the Coast needs to make more of an effort to be inclusive. Adam's assertion that "In the past, the singular use of the male descriptor was not distracting, as this was a male demographic game" might capture his feelings, but it shows an alarming lack of understanding of the possibilities of the medium, its future, and the possible responses a work can generate. As a woman who has been involved with the game for decades now, I am quite aware that the medium is predominantly male.

But it is not exclusively male. Point of fact: Until my recent move, most of my gaming groups have been predominantly, if not exclusively, female in their demographic. There are plenty of female gamers out here, and I have to suggest the possibility that there might be many many more female gamers if it were not for the traditional bias demonstrated by earlier editions of the game.

I know a lot of people would question what the big deal is. They might well ask how the use of a single pronoun could make that much of a difference. The only answer I can give is to explain it as a domino effect. On the one hand, the issue of a pronoun is not really the issue. But if you picture it as a domino at the beginning of a line of dominos all balanced precariously on a table, you can see the progression if you tip it over. Not using feminine pronouns, or even severely limiting the use of feminine pronouns, meant it was difficult to imagine feminine examples in the books. Not seeing the feminine in examples made it difficult to imagine women characters as women and not just male characters with funny names. Once women characters (played by either sex) were automatically seen as different or difficult, it was even more difficult—often impossible—to see women as players. Then, when you were lucky enough to get women players, it often became discouraging for them to struggle against rules that were designed against the traditional feminine approach to problem solving. Let's face it: The "hack-and-slash" form of gaming does not appeal to most women over the long term. In my experience, women tend to favor the "role" part of roleplaying more than the "roll" part. The end result is that most women who are brave enough to try gaming on their own (and not because their significant other is a gamer) don't stay with it long, or they migrate to one of the more gender friendly forms like White Wolf games.

I applaud Wizards of the Coast for making an effort to restack those dominoes in a different formation. Whatever problems I have with the new edition, gendered language is not one of them.

Adam, I suggest you learn to broaden your horizons. Learn to accept the fact that "he" can be distracting to approximately 57% of the world's population. (That's right Adam, we outnumber you.) We don't automatically assume you have to read everything from our prospective, we just don't want to have to read everything from yours either.

Julie Ratliff • Makanda, IL

MOST OF MY GAMING GROUPS HAVE BEEN PREDOMINANTLY, IF NOT EXCLUSIVELY, FEMALE IN THEIR DEMOGRAPHIC.

Agenda?

I have been playing D&D for over eighteen years now, and I have to admit I was pessimistic regarding the release of the new edition. After trying it I have found it simpler, while maintaining its playability and redressing many problems that existed in 2nd Edition. With good game mechanics and playtesting, Wizards of the Coast has managed to provide us with a game that surpasses the previous edition while continuing to maintain the basic structure of the game. I was adamantly against the new edition until I tried it, but after experiencing the game play I have to admit that it surpasses its predecessor. To the game developers and playtesters I have this to say: "Great Job!"

There is one problem that I have with the new edition: I'm tired of this politically correct kick that Wizards of the Coast has been on, and I was hoping that we could go back to the English language on this new edition. Why is it necessary in every first person example to use the word "she?" In 2nd Edition, there was a kit called the amazon that received a bonus because men wouldn't regard her as a physical threat. No player would make that mistake anymore with every other orc leader and barbarian warlord being female. I don't know who does your marketing, but please let them know that although I really enjoy your game, I really don't want to purchase anyone's political or social agenda.

[name and address withheld]

Purpose of New Edition?

Your magazine urged us to withhold judgment on the new edition until we thoroughly tried it out. I have finally completed that exercise, and I must say I am stunned and appalled by what you've done. Does the phrase "backwards compatibility" mean anything to you?

Imagine how *Windows* users would feel if Microsoft made a change to that operating system so that none of the users' existing data or programs worked without major revisions? Well, in one fell swoop you've managed to make obsolete all of your users' existing characters, monsters, modules, spells, accessories, pantheons, and so on.

It all boils down to the question of what is the purpose of issuing a new edition? Is it to fix problems with the previous edition or to fulfill the designers' vision of the "best" game possible? Obviously, I believe it should have been the former approach. I think each change should have been required to pass the "is it worth forcing our existing users to relearn this rule" test. You apparently have taken the latter approach, and this makes casualties of all the prior game materials.

In particular, the worst sources of incompatibility you introduced are the addition of feats and attacks of opportunity. Feats, rather than being interesting optional add-ons to the game, have become the center of it. No character is complete without them, and every battle invokes them. Since characters gain feats with levels, monsters must gain feats proportionate to their hit dice to keep in balance.

Keep in mind that adding feats to characters and creatures is not a trivial task. Picking an optimal ordered subset of feats from the full set is a task of complexity. What was so broken in 2nd Edition that justified requiring your users to perform this difficult task on every single character and creature?

Similarly, your completely new concept of attacks of opportunity causes battles to run very differently because they must be contemplated in almost every tactical choice. Again, was there anything broken in 2nd Edition that necessitated their introduction, or did you just prefer the game feel of the new approach?

I am also extremely disappointed with your leaving sphere-based priest spells and specialty priests—that adds an immense amount of incompatibility with 2nd Edition and my ongoing campaign.

If it wasn't obvious enough that you

had insufficient concern about your installed user base as it were, you even made numerous needless changes in terminology. Is *summon monster* so much better than *monster summoning* that it was worth asking your existing gamers to learn a new name? Is *remove disease* so much better than *cure disease*?

This last example illustrates the new edition's saddest casualty of all: existing players and DMs. Any 2nd Edition player who chooses to play the new edition must go through the onerous task of learning the enormous number of changes, many of which are subtle, easily confused, and of dubious necessity. Believe me, I know. My gaming group spent hours and hours mapping out the changes to make sure we weren't screwing up, but became overwhelmed by the task!

You haven't made a new edition of D&D—you've made a whole new game masquerading as a successor. I think that Wizards of the Coast owes a deep apology (preferably accompanied by continued support of 2nd Edition) to its long-term players (who are its most loyal customers) for the needless burden and expense it has foisted upon us and for the inconsiderate and thoughtless choices it has made.

Your formerly loyal customer,
Allen Cohn • San Francisco, CA

Shades of Neutral

Mr. Gross asked some very good questions about alignment, but I think the most important was "Tell us how alignment works in your game." I take my cue from a refinement of the *detect good* and *detect evil* spells that I saw in a FORGOTTEN REALMS supplement (I forget which one). This refinement made it clear that only those who were truly dedicated to being good or evil (or with the new edition, law or chaos too), such as paladins or demons, would be detected by such spells. Most ordinary people (and most PCs) would not be. The way I interpret that in my game is that except for the paladin (with regards to law and good), the monk (with regards to law), the blackguard (with regards to evil), the assassin (with regards to evil), a character has to try really hard to be anything but some shade of neutral.

This does not mean that a character cannot write "lawful good" on his character sheet, but I do not expect most lawful good characters to be filled with love and concern for their fellows all the time. Nor do I expect someone who is neutral evil to be a psychopath. I expect characters to be as contradictory and conflicted as real people. The neutral evil character might love his friends. The lawful good character might be a bigot. The real benefit of stressing the connection to neutrality is that alignment conflicts are reduced (but not forgotten). Thus a player is free to develop the personality of the character rather than being bound to one of nine caricatures. The player running a neutral evil character does not feel the need to kill kittens and push old ladies into the street. The player running a lawful good character does not have to feel a responsibility to report the party to the authorities for not paying taxes on the gold they found. Perhaps best of all, the players can play a mix of alignments without being at each others' throats. They can save their alignment conflicts for a climactic part of the story rather than trotting them out all the time.

Obviously, my vision of alignment is different from that presented in the *Player's Handbook*. I take a look at their description of alignments as extremes rather than norms. Certainly, a good character could be saintly, and an evil character could be casually murderous, but a lot of good and evil characters won't fit those extremes.

Juan-Calle • Tamarac, FL

THE UNSPEAKABLE OAF **by John Kovalic**

PC PORTRAITS

ILLUSTRATED BY JEFF LAUBENSTEIN

Sorcerers are bound to be an interesting bunch because of the nature of their magic. Jeff captures the range of the class with his masterful pen and ink work. (How often have you encountered a fat elf?)

Peter Whitley, Art Director

ROLE MODELS

Painting Miniatures, Part 3

by Mike McVey • photographs by Craig Cudnohufsky

Last month we started to take a look at the basic techniques of painting miniatures and how neatness is the most important thing for beginners. This month we're going to show you how to add more depth and realism to your miniatures.

Natural Lighting

When you look at someone's clothing, you see that where light hits the surface of the clothes the colors are lighter. The areas that are in shade, such as creases and folds, are darker. Because miniatures are so small, the effects of natural lighting are minimal. The areas in question simply aren't large enough to cast any real shadows; this results in flat colors. The solution is to artificially paint these lighting differences onto the miniature. Paint lighter colors onto the areas that would catch the light and deeper colors into the folds and creases. This is called highlighting and shading, and it is the most important painting technique to master.

Base Coat

There are three stages to the highlighting and shading process. The base coat is the flat color over which the highlight and shading colors are applied. The addition of highlighting and shading should add the illusion of depth to the base color without altering it. If you add too much shading over the base coat, the overall effect will be to darken the color; too much highlighting will lighten it.

When applying the base coat, all you are looking for is neat, even coverage with no patchy or overlapping colors. This gives you the ideal surface over which you can apply your shade and highlight colors.

Miniatures that feature broad areas with simple textures are a great place to practice your highlighting techniques.

Shading

The first question to consider is where to apply shading. In general, shade colors are applied to the recesses and crevices of a model—the areas that would be in shadow if they were on a real object. I work on the assumption that the deeper the fold or crease, the deeper the shade color.

One easy way to add shading to a miniature is to use a black undercoat; this creates fairly basic—but effective—shading. All you need to do is leave a little of the undercoat showing in the deepest areas of the miniature. This only works when used between different areas of the miniature, such as where a tunic meets a cloak, or the edges of a belt. If a thin line of the undercoat is left showing in these areas, there is far greater contrast between them and a real feeling of depth is achieved.

Highlighting

When light hits a surface, it naturally catches on the most prominent areas, such as the tops of folds and creases, and the edges of belts and straps. This is represented on miniatures by picking out these areas in a slightly lighter tone of the base color.

The highlighting really stands out on these two examples painted by Jason Soles. Neither miniature is finished, although the one on the left has more paint on it. You can easily see Jason's highlighting on the quiver.

Mixing Shade and Highlight Colors

If you are adding shade and highlight colors to an area, it means you will need three shades of the same color: the base coat, highlight, and shade tones. The easiest way to get these is to mix them. For example, if you are painting a cloak blue, you could get the highlight color by adding white to the base color. Just put a bit of the base color on your palette and mix it with a little white until you get a lighter shade of blue. (Just be careful to wash all the blue out of your brush before putting it in the white pot.) Most colors can be lightened with either white or, in the case of warm colors, yellow.

Mixing shade colors is more difficult. You could just add black to the color you are using, but in most cases this makes the color muddy and unattractive, and in some cases the result is disastrous. Shade colors are *deeper* tones of the base color, rather than darker colors, and these can be very hard to mix. In the case of the blue cloak, you need a deeper blue to add to the base color to produce a shading tone.

Applying the Colors

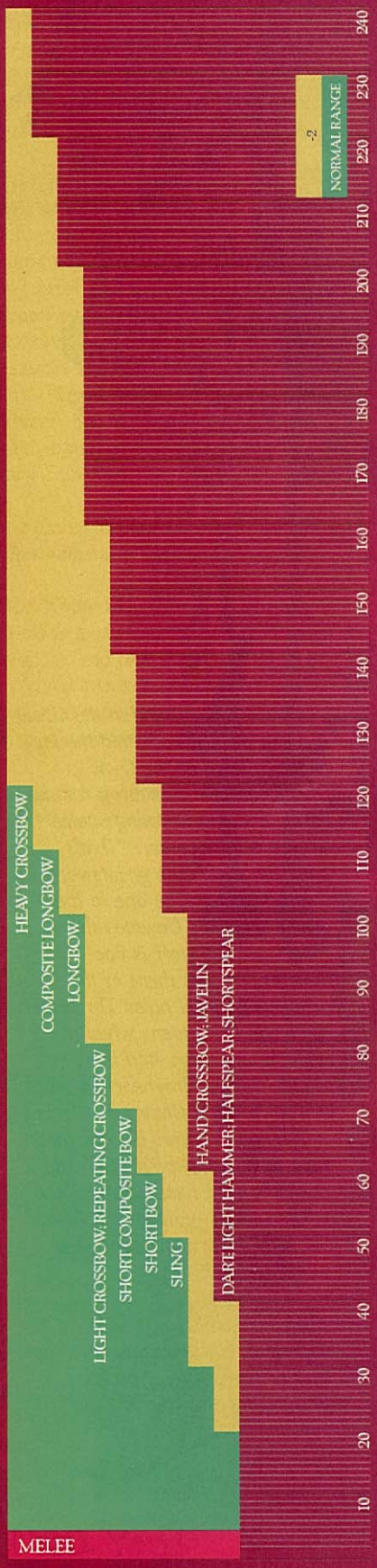
A good rule of thumb for miniature painting is to paint the most inaccessible areas first. When the base coat is dry, start with the shading. Use a mid-size brush (a o size is probably ideal) and carefully apply the shade color to the recesses. When the paint is dry, you can use the base color to tidy up the shading by painting over it where necessary. The highlight color is applied similarly to the raised areas, and again can be tidied up with a little of the base color if your brush strays. Always remember to make sure the colors are dry before applying any more paint.

Highlighting and shading is a simple technique, but it requires lots of practice to master. As with so many aspects of miniature painting there are no hard and fast rules; it's really a matter of judgement where to apply the highlights or how light the color needs to be. With practice, far more subtle results can be achieved by using several intermediate shades. The effect you want is a subtle gradation of color from dark to light that gives the illusion of depth.

Apart from the fairly basic form of shading and highlighting discussed here, there are several techniques that can be used on different parts of the miniature to create the same effect. Future articles will address some of these, such as drybrushing, washes, and blending. D

"CAN I HIT IT FROM HERE?"

You'll pick up the right weapon for the distance with this chart. Simply clip it out and pin it to the back of the person in before you in the marching order.



THE PLAY'S THE THING

by Robin D. Laws · illustrated by John Kovalic

YOUR DM: You stand in the Great Armory of Arcsool, amid the legendary Cadre of the Oval Chamber. As they suit up for the battle to come, a young squire whispers in your ear: "That's Tatin; he wields the greatsword ***Twain-Cleaver****. The one in the ermine robes is Oewetes the Magificier; his staff is* ***Foe-Bleeder****. Thraina there in the bejeweled corset holds* ***Thrummer****, the blade that moans when the unliving are near. And there stands Ogmar Graybeard, wielder of the* ***Crimson Chains of Gloms****."*

The squire draws back respectfully as he sees the magnificent Ogmar's head turn towards you.

"You there—youngling," Ogmar booms. "What name does your weapon bear?"

YOU: "Uh, well. I was thinking of naming it, but you know, I've been kind of busy lately. You know. With the orc-slaying and all."

Last month in "The Play's the Thing," we showed you how a colorful battle-cry can make your character more fun to play, as well as tell everyone an essential fact about your PC's history or personality. This time, we're going to take a step back and look at an even simpler method for lending your existing PC a sense of distinctiveness. If you've focused more on the monster-slaying and puzzle-solving aspects of the D&D game until now, you may not necessarily know what kind of personality you want to give your PC. It could be that the personality you enjoy portraying is simply a fellow who likes to slay monsters and solve puzzles.

Naming your weapon gives your character something that's unique to him, without making any big decisions for you about his true nature or future goals. After you've customized his weapon, you might feel inspired to go on to embellish him further. Or you might feel content to leave him as Arras the Monster-Slayer, who wields the famous cudgel Drum-Beater. Even at that, your character sheet will have a bit more zip to it than most.

Before you name your weapon, you need to decide which member of your arsenal gets the honor. It should be the killing implement your PC first reaches for in a fight. You don't have to wait for a fancy magic weapon before you name your blade or spear. In fact, you might be better off naming a mundane weapon. That way, if you lose the original, you can give the same name to its replacement, with no one the wiser. If you lose the magic sword Ogrebane, you face mockery when your ability to dispatch ogres is obviously lessened.

Some GMs have been known to seize on a player's naming of a mundane weapon by deciding that it has latent magic qualities the PC can awaken in the course of his adventures. Although I can't make any promises that your DM will follow up on this hint, it never hurts to try.

Having selected your weapon, it's time to figure out its name. There are several ways to go about this.

The Tome of Many Words

Whether you find it online, on CD-ROM, or even on an old-fashioned bookshelf, a thesaurus is a great tool for kick-starting ideas. In this case, you can find suitable inspiration for weapon names by finding synonyms for violent-sounding words like harm, kill, blood, hit, cut, blade, club, sword, pain, and so on. You're looking for a word that suggests action. Good weapon names usually have verbs in them. Here are some examples of weapon names hot from the pages of a thesaurus:

Avenger
Biter
Crusher
Cutter
Destroyer
Gibbet
Gnawer
Goremaker
Maimer
Mangler
Render
Ripper
Slayer
Thorn
Wounder

Lawful good characters, especially those with a merciful bent, might want more positive-sounding words in their quest for a weapon name. They might choose names like:

Champion
Corrector
Defender
Faithkeeper
Guardian
Protector
Vindicator

If you're an old hand at naming weapons and don't mind coming up with an exotic name that you'll have to explain to your DM and fellow players, you can just plunk your finger down on a random page in the thesaurus. The fun is figuring out how to relate this random word to a weapon. You can not only create a unique name, but also an entire backstory that explains how your sword or staff came to possess it. Here are some examples of odd names derived from random thesaurus jabbing:

Bright
Confuser
Deceiver
Devourer
Eager
Harbinger
Hope
Hurricane
Invader
Mocker
Timekeeper
Vandal
Whirl

Who Will Taste Its Fury?

The word you've chosen might stand on its own, or it might require a modifier. If your character has a special animosity towards a particular type of monster or person, he can expect to be using the weapon against them on a regular basis. He can indicate this in the weapon's name, perhaps in hopes of striking fear into the hearts of his chosen enemies. So Mangler becomes Orc-Mangler; Slayer, Liar-Slayer; and so on.

What You First Did With It

Another method of weapon-naming comes from events that occur in play. Name the weapon after your first, or most notable, exploit with it. If you manage to dispatch a dragon early in your career, commemorate the achievement by naming the weapon you used Wyrm-Killer. Make sure that you select a name that you can grow into by keeping the nature of your achievement suitably vague. Perhaps you held your own against a trio of bugbears during your first adventure. While impressive for a starting character, a sword called Bugbear-Bane will seem a bit puny when you reach high levels. Instead call it Many-Slayer or Death-of-All. Like advertising copy, a good weapon name knows when to be economical with details.

Where You Got It

Place names in a D&D world often carry a sense of grandeur and legend. Sometimes all you need to do to create an impressive name for your weapon is to name it after the land or dungeon where you found it. The Sword of Greyhawk, Staff of Waterdeep, or Stormweather Dagger all sound like mighty implements of legend, even when their connection to the places whose names they borrow is sketchy.

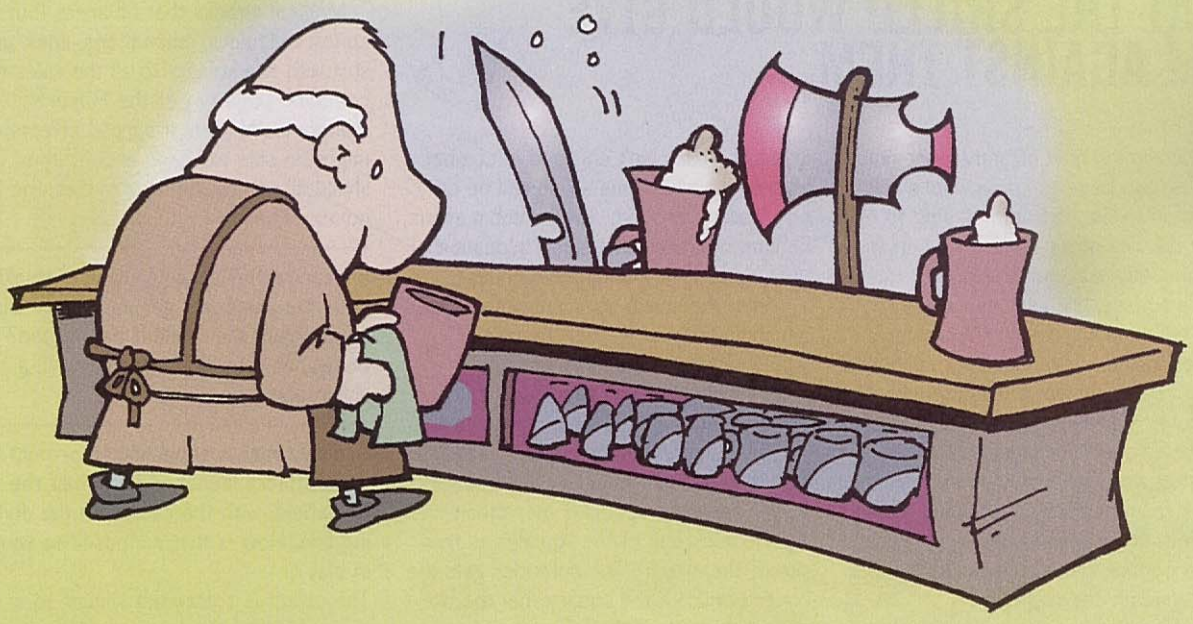
What It Does

Magic weapons do half the job of naming for you by presenting you with a general theme to draw inspiration from. Don't refer to an oft-used magic weapon by the generic title given in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Get thee to a thesaurus and turn your brilliant energy weapon into the Scintillant Hammer, dub your ghost-touch weapon Wraith-Bane, or name your shocking sword Eel's-Son.

"You there! Youngling," Ogmar booms. "What name does your weapon bear?"

YOU: "Know this, Ogmar: Though this blade looks humble, it is named The Exile, and until I can return it to its rightful place in the Halls of Aundh, it will exact its vengeance on the usurper's minions!"

Sounds pretty impressive for a *+1 short sword*, doesn't it?



"I USED TO BE A BIG SHOT- A **BIG SHOT**, I TELL YOU! THEN MY OWNER NAMED ME "CHEESE STALKER"... "

SAGE ADVICE

Need some help with your game?

by Skip Williams (thesage@wizards.com)

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO
"Sage Advice," *Dragon Magazine*
1801 Lind Avenue S.W.; Renton, WA 98055

THIS MONTH

The Sage takes a look at tower shields, shield *spells, familiars, and other aspects of combat and magic in the D&D game.*

I'm unclear on how the tower shield works. If you crouch behind it do you get total cover against ranged attacks? If you plan to peek around and, say, throw a javelin, how much cover does it provide against ranged attacks? How much cover does a tower shield provide against melee attacks?

The tower shield gives cover against both ranged and melee attacks. It also can provide cover against spells and other magical attacks (see the next question).

WHEN THE SHIELD USER ATTACKS, HIS FOES GET THE SAME COVER THAT THE SHIELD WOULD GIVE HIM AGAINST THEM.

To determine how effective a tower shield is, you have to know where it is in relation to the character trying to use it, just like any other form of cover. If you think of the tower shield user occupying a square, the user can place the shield either along one of the square's sides or at one of the square's corners. Placing the shield along a side gives total cover against attacks that come from or through the square across from that side, half cover from attacks coming from or through squares at the adjacent corners, and no cover against attacks coming from anywhere else (see the accompanying diagram).

The user also can place the shield at a corner of his square at a 45-degree or shallower angle. If placed at a 45-degree angle, the shield gives total cover against attacks coming from or through the square at the corner, half cover against attacks coming from or through the squares adjacent, and no cover against attacks from anywhere else. A shallow angle gives total cover at the corner, as described above, three-quarters cover along one side, and one-quarter cover along the other side (see the diagram).

Each turn, the tower shield user decides where to place the shield, and it stays there until the user's next turn. When the user isn't engaged in combat, he decides where the shield will be as he's walking around; when combat starts, he cannot change the shield's location until his turn in the initiative order.

When the shield user attacks, his foes get the same cover that the shield would give him against them.

To resolve ranged attacks or melee attacks made with reach, draw a line from the center of the attacker's square to the center of the defender's square (if the defender occupies more than one square, pick one of the squares as the site of the attack). The defender gets the cover bonus of the square that the line passes through. If the line passes through more than one square the shield covers, use the highest cover bonus.

Will a tower shield protect against dragon's breath, magical rays, and the like? Can the user automatically save against a *fireball* or even take no damage if he has total cover behind the shield?

It depends on the type of magical attack. If the magical attack specifically targets the shield user (that is, it does not merely affect the area that contains the shield user but is aimed right at the shield user), the shield has no effect. All rays fall into this category, as does any spell that has a Target entry in its header and any spell that has an Effect entry and affects creatures (provided, of course, that the attacker can and does choose the shield user as a target).

Magical attacks that fill areas (bursts, cones, cylinders, emanations, lines, and spreads) are subject to all the rules for cover on page 133 of the *Player's Handbook*. Note that spread effects might be able to reach around the shield. If so, the shield provides one-half cover at best.

If a character has a shield (any shield), does the character get the Armor Class bonus from the shield if flat-footed?

Being flat-footed doesn't remove a shield bonus.

A *shield* spell is supposed to protect you from attacks launched from half the battlefield, with the caster on the dividing line. How is that supposed to work in play?

The effect is somewhat similar to a tower shield (see this month's first question), except that the spell doesn't interfere with your attacks and you are

protected against attacks launched from a much larger area.

If you think of the spellcaster as standing in a square, the *shield* spell effect can be placed so that it lines up with one side of the caster's square and extends out infinitely to the left and right. The spell provides cover against any attack that has to cross that line. The spell effect also can be placed on a diagonal so that it covers two sides of the caster's square, in which case the line extends away like steps in a staircase (see the accompanying diagram).

POWERPLAY

BY BILL BALDWIN

"Fear not, for I, Jelzea, priestess of Pelor, shall beat those bugbears off you with my stick."

A 1st-level human cleric with an 18 Strength, the Strength domain, the Ambidexterity and Two-Weapon Fighting feats, wielding a quarterstaff can attack twice in a round with +2 to her attack rolls and +6/+3 to damage. When she reaches 3rd level, she can enhance her Strength to 21 for 1 round (or more if she uses her domain spell *bull's strength*) and use the Power Attack feat to give her +2 to attack rolls and +8/+5 to damage.

The description for the *shield* spell says its provides three-quarters cover. Page 132 of the *Player's Handbook* says an attacker can't execute an attack of opportunity against a character with one-half or better cover. So, is a spellcaster protected by a *shield* spell immune to attacks of opportunity, even when casting spells in melee?

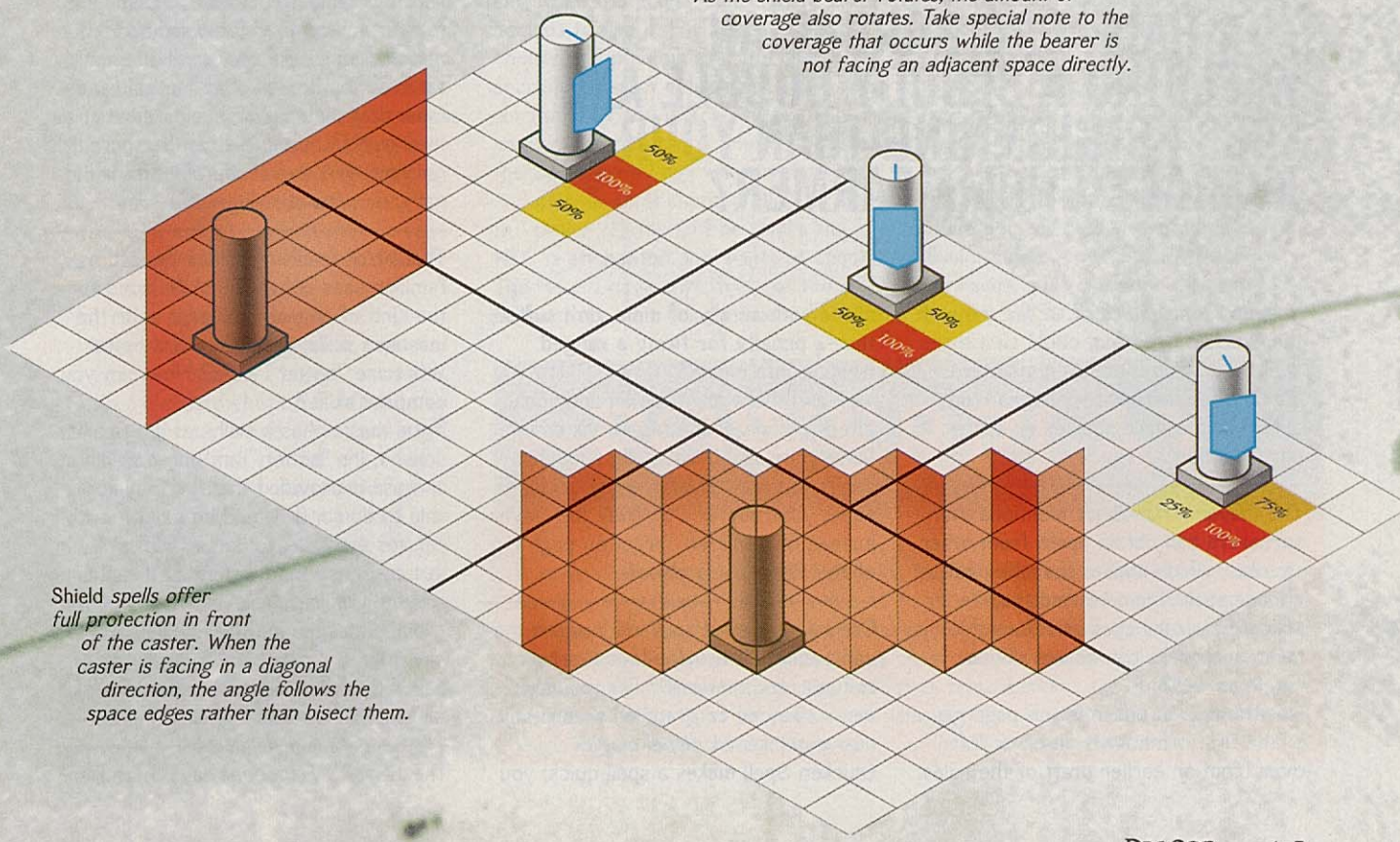
No. The character is immune from attacks of opportunity made from the half of the battlefield covered by the *shield*, though (see the previous question).

Can the *shield* spell add to the Armor Class bonus provided by the *mage armor* spell or a suit of armor? How about a regular shield? What about the *shield* spell and *bracers of armor*?

A *shield* spell provides a cover bonus, which stacks with all other defensive bonuses except other cover bonuses, including an armor bonus from any source.

Can you cast two *shield* spells and cover yourself against attacks from anywhere on the battlefield?

Tower Shield & *Shield* Spell



As the shield bearer rotates, the amount of coverage also rotates. Take special note to the coverage that occurs while the bearer is not facing an adjacent space directly.

Shield *spells offer full protection in front of the caster. When the caster is facing in a diagonal direction, the angle follows the space edges rather than bisect them.*

The Human Blade Barrier

A 1st-level human fighter with an 18 Dexterity, and the Exotic Weapon Proficiency (spiked chain) feat, Combat Reflexes feat and Weapon Finesse (spiked chain) feat can get as many as 5 attacks of opportunity against targets within 10 feet of him and would receive a +5 to his attack rolls with each of these attacks. He can make these attacks of opportunity even when he is flat-footed and would add one and a half times his strength bonus to his damage because the spiked chain requires two hands to wield.

No. The spell's target is you (the caster), so when you cast it you get a single disc of force you can use for defense. If you cast the spell a second time, you still have a single disc of force you can use for defense. If the spell's target was the disc (or if the spell was an area spell or effect spell) you could have more than one, just like you can summon more than one monster or create more than one *wall of force*. The target is you, however, so you can have only one *shield* spell running at a time.

The *haste* and *mass haste* spells allow their subjects an extra partial action per turn. Spellcasting is a partial action. Does this mean that a *hasted* spellcaster can cast two spells in a single round?

IS A HALF-ORC BARBARIAN WIELDING A BLOODY DOUBLE AXE LESS FRIGHTENING THAN YOUR AVERAGE GNOME FARMER?

Yes, and a *hasted* cleric or wizard with the Quicken Spell feat could cast three spells in a round: one as a standard action, the quickened spell as a free action, and a third spell as an extra partial action.

The *Player's Handbook* mentions that sorcerers can obtain spells from other sources, which implies that they can choose spells from beyond the sorcerer/wizard spell list. Does this mean sorcerers can access divine magic as well?

No. The text in question (on page 50 of the first printing) is an error left over from an earlier draft of the rules. The error has since been corrected. Sorcerers are limited to spells on the sorcerer/wizard list. Note that other books add spells to the sorcerer/wizard list and sorcerers certainly can use those.

Is a spellcaster who chooses to cast defensively considered to be fighting defensively with a +2 dodge bonus to AC and a -4 to attack? Does the result of the character's Concentration check before casting a spell make a difference?

No, and no. To fight defensively, you have to use the full attack action. If you cast a spell, you use the cast a spell action.

If I cast a ray spell (ranged touch attack) at a foe who is engaged in melee with an ally of mine, do I suffer the -4 penalty for firing a ranged weapon into melee?

Yes, and there might be an additional attack penalty if the target has cover from your ally. If your ally provides cover to your target, the ray could strike your ally (see Striking the Cover Instead of a Missed Target on page 133 of the *Player's Handbook*).

Does a quickened spell still require the components it usually does (verbal, somatic, and material)? For example, can a silenced or grappled wizard still cast a quickened *dispel magic*?

Quicken Spell makes a spell quick; you still need all the components normally required for a quickened spell. For casting spells while grappled, you need Still Spell. For casting spells while silenced, you need Silent Spell.

Does casting a quickened spell provoke an attack of opportunity? Can a counterattack or counterspell be readied against a quickened spell, or is it too quick to identify or counter?

A quickened spell still provokes an attack of opportunity (but you can cast a quickened spell defensively). A quickened spell can be counterspelled using the normal rules.

When an opposite spell is used to negate an effect that is already in place (such as using a *slow* spell to counter a *haste* spell), is the success of the dispel automatic, or is a level check required? Does the subject or the caster of the spell being countered and dispelled get a saving throw?

Two opposite spells simply negate each other. No dispel check is required, no saving throw is allowed, and spell resistance does not apply.

Can masters who possess spell-like or supernatural abilities share them with their familiars (or paladins' mounts)? Can the master share any spell she receives or just spells she casts?

Master and familiar (or paladin's mount), can share only spells the master casts on herself (that is, the master must cast the spell and select herself as the target). Only spells can be shared, not spell-like, supernatural, extraordinary, or natural abilities.

The list of familiar abilities says the familiar uses either the skills listed for the kind of animal familiar it is or the master's skills, whichever are better. What are "better" skills? How can you compare skills?

If the master has a skill and the familiar doesn't, it's "better," and the familiar can use it provided that it is physically able to do so. (It would be hard for a cat, for example, to use a Craft skill.) In this case, use the master's skill ranks and the familiar's relevant ability score.

If the master and the familiar both have the same skill, the familiar uses either the master's or the familiar's skill ranks, whichever is higher.

The *Player's Handbook* says a familiar

gets half the master's hit points. What constitutes the master's hit points? Does the master's Constitution modifier apply? What about the Toughness feat? What about temporary hit point increases such as *aid* spells or extra hit points from temporary Constitution increases such as the *endurance* spell?
The familiar gets half the master's (undamaged) hit points, rounded down. Constitution bonuses and the Toughness feat count, as does any other permanent hit point gain (such as from gaining a level or a permanent increase in Constitution). Temporary hit point gains don't affect the familiar's hit points.

If a character has multiple attacks and becomes *hasted*, would he only receive one extra attack per round? What if he had two weapons? Would he get two extra attacks (one with each weapon)? What happens when a character has two weapons and uses the attack or charge action rather than the full-attack action? Does the character attack once with each weapon or just once?
You can attack only once with a partial or standard action, no matter how many weapons you have. You've got to use the full-attack action (a full-round action) to get any additional attacks to which you might be entitled.

Half-orcs have a -2 to penalty to their Charisma scores, which makes sense given their lack of charm and brutal social graces. However, the Intimidate skill is based on Charisma, which means that a half-orc barbarian wielding a bloody double axe is less frightening than your average gnome farmer wielding a cob of corn. Is there a reason behind this or is this due for a rules patch?
No "rules patch" is planned.

You can, however, give the half orc in your example a +2 bonus (or more) to the Intimidate check for a favorable circumstance. In some cases, you can even allow the half-orc (or any other character) to use an ability modifier other than Charisma for Intimidate checks. For example, if the half-orc decides to tie a knot in a horseshoe to intimidate someone, you can use the character's Strength modifier instead (see Skills with Different Abilities on page 91 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*).

Can the 0-level *light* spell be cast on an opponent's eyes (perhaps as a touch attack)? There is no spell resistance to this new version of the *light* spell, so this could be an effective use of the spell to blind someone. However, I feel this was not in the spirit of what was intended for the spell.

THE PLAYER ROLLS THE CHECK WHENEVER ACTIVELY USING A SKILL. THE DM USUALLY ROLLS THE CHECK WHEN THE CHARACTER MIGHT NOTICE SOMETHING WITHOUT REALLY TRYING.

You're right. The spell doesn't work on creatures, only objects. You can't cast the spell on a point in space, either. Note that casting a spell on a creature's equipment is the same as casting on the creature. In this case, you can cast the spell on an object in a creature's possession if the creature is willing, but not if it is unwilling.

I'm confused about the Sense Motive skill. It's not clear when the DM secretly rolls a check for the player, and when the player consciously decides to use it. For opposed Bluff checks, it's obvious that the DM secretly rolls for the player. However, for hunches and interacting with enchanted characters, who rolls? Does the DM secretly roll when a player encounters an enchanted NPC, or does the player tell the DM he thinks the NPC is enchanted and wants to check? The issue I have with many of the skills is that they state "the player can roll a skill check," but several times I feel that it means to say, "the DM secretly rolls a skill check for the player" (for opposed rolls like Spot and Listen).
In general, the player rolls the check whenever actively using any skill. The DM usually rolls the check secretly in circumstances when the character might happen to notice something without really trying, or anytime the DM wants to keep what's really going on a secret. For example, the character listens at a door, and the DM rolls the Listen check secretly so that the player doesn't know if there's really no noise there or if he just got a bad roll. Exactly when to let the player roll and when to roll secretly is a matter of judgment and personal preference.

If a character encounters a figment of a monster and decides to attack, what are the odds of a character striking the figment? I realize that according to the new rules for figments, if the character strikes an illusory creature, and the spellcaster does not cause the creature to react in an appropriate manner, the character will realize the monster is an illusion (incontrovertible evidence). However, what does the character need to roll to hit the illusion in the

POWERPLAY

Death from the Shadows

A 1st-level elven rogue with 20 Dexterity, the Point Blank Shot feat can fire a longbow at a target within 30 feet with a +6 to his attack roll and do 1d8+1 points of damage. If she catches her opponent flat-footed, which is likely since she has a +5 to initiative, she can add another 1d6 points of sneak attack damage. When she reaches 3rd level she can add the Rapid Shot feat. Then she can attack twice at +8/+8 and do as many as 42 points of damage (1d8+1 twice for 2 arrows, and 2d6 twice for 2 sneak attacks) in one round, not including critical hits.

first place? In addition, during this fake-combat, how many disbelief rolls will the character get, anyway?
Since the creature isn't real the attack roll is irrelevant. If you want to make an attack roll anyway, give the figment an Armor Class of 10, adjusted for size.

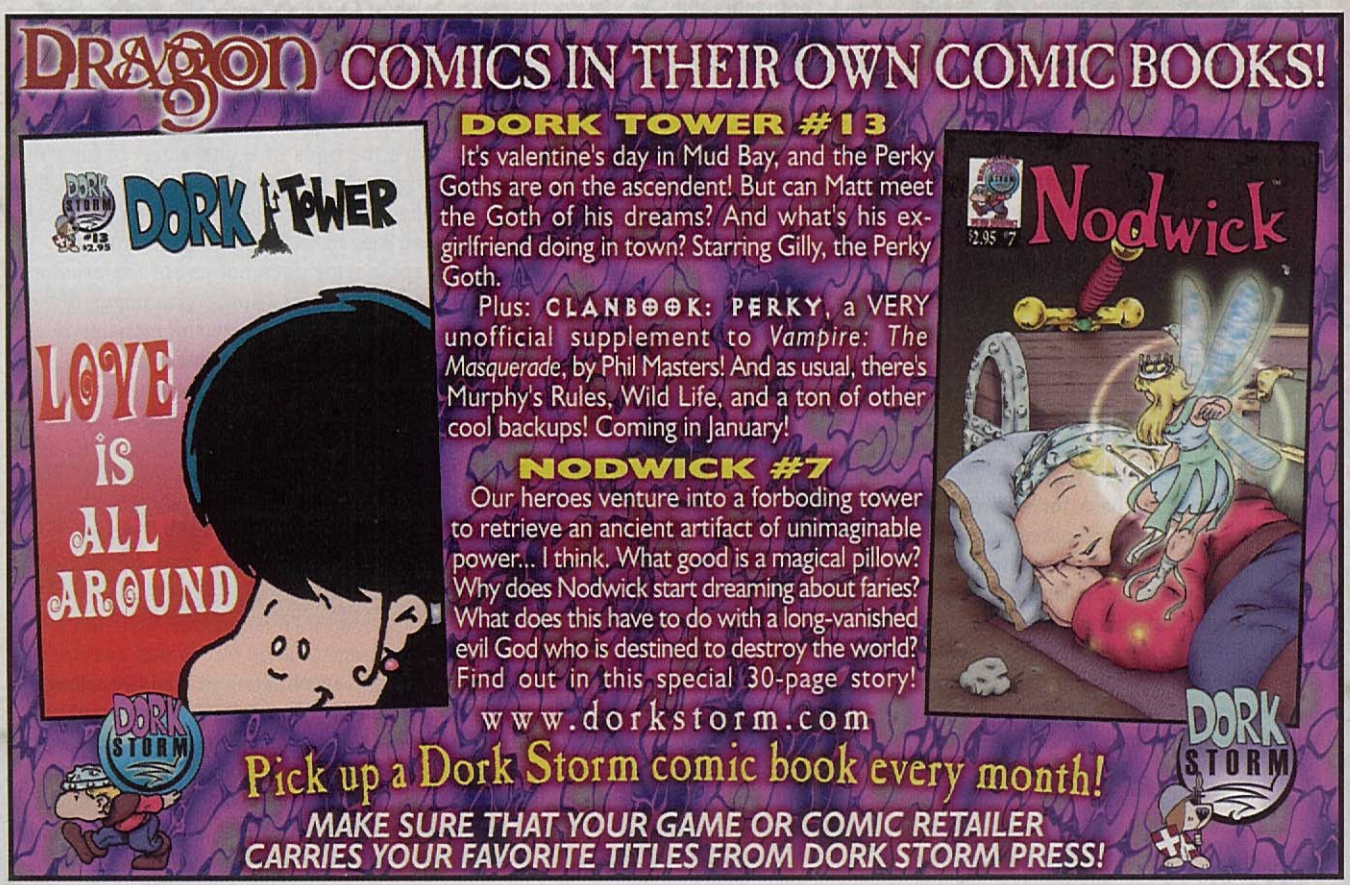
DO THE BASE ATTACK BONUSES AND UNARMED ATTACK BONUSES STACK FOR MONKS?

After each attack, allow a saving throw for disbelief whether the character hits or not. The very act of attacking means the character is interacting with the illusion. A hit will not necessarily lead to automatic disbelief if the caster is around to make the illusory creature react. The caster could, for example make the illusion roll with a blow and emerge with a mere nick, or even without a scratch.

I would like to know if the base attack bonuses and the unarmed attack bonuses stack for monks. I could not find anything about this in the description, but at higher levels these bonuses seem like they could be excessive if they do stack.
Do not add values from the Base Attack Bonus column on Table 3-10 in the *Player's Handbook* to the values on the Unarmed Attack Bonus column. Use the Base Attack Bonus when the monks makes an armed attack and the Unarmed Attack Bonus column when the monks makes an unarmed attack (but see the next question).

Does a monk always have to use his unarmed attack bonus when making an unarmed attack? What happens when a 10th-level fighter picks up one level of monk? Does the character now have an attack bonus of +0 when making unarmed attacks?
No. A monk does not always have to use his unarmed attack bonus when making unarmed attacks. The monk can use his best available attack bonus (and number of attacks) along with his unarmed damage or use just his unarmed attack bonus and unarmed damage. For example, a 10th-level fighter/1st level monk has a base attack bonus of +10/+5, which is much better than a 1st-level monk's +0. The character can make two unarmed attacks and still use his 1st-level unarmed damage of 1d6.

You seem to be confused by the text dealing with multiclassed monks on page 55 of the *Player's Handbook*. This text merely points out that a monk has the option to use only his unarmed attack bonus for unarmed attacks if doing so would give him more attacks. For example, a 1st-level fighter/10th-level monk has a total attack bonus of +8/+3 (+1 for being a 1st-level fighter, +7 for being a 10th-level monk). When attacking unarmed, the monk can make two attacks at +8/+3 or the monk can use just his 10th-level unarmed attack bonus of +7/+4/+1 since that gives the character more attacks.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DUNGEONCRAFT

Let's Take it from the Top

by Ray Winninger

Send email to: scalemail@wizards.com

"Dungeoncraft" c/o *Dragon Magazine*
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In the last two installments, "Dungeoncraft" took a long look at the new game rules and briefly discussed ways in which Dungeon Mastering under the new rules might be different than DMing under the old rules. In the twenty-odd columns prior to that, we stepped through the entire process of creating a brand new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS campaign, from the initial inspiration right up to the first adventure and beyond. Those of you who have been reading from the start should have more than a passing familiarity with the art of dungeoncraft by now. In fact, you're probably already zooming past the materials covered here to explore interesting ideas of your own.

At this point, the best way to continue your education is to back up and start an entirely new campaign from the ground up. This will allow us to illustrate some alternate approaches to those taken in the past. It gives us an opportunity to continue exploring the new rules and to revisit my old advice when necessary. Most importantly, now that we've been through the entire process once, we can attempt something a bit more ambitious this time around. Aris was essentially a traditional D&D game world with a few twists all its own; let's aim for something that's unique on this outing. "Dungeoncraft" will focus energies on both demonstrating the flexibility of the D&D game and providing advice on how to occasionally modify the game's rules in order to further lend the campaign its own flavor. We'll continue to presume that you've read all the previous installments of the column, though, so if you haven't, now is a good time to hit the website and catch up.

Those of you who have grown fond of Aris over the past couple of years shouldn't despair—it needn't be abandoned. Any and all interested readers are encouraged to flesh out Aris to your hearts' content. If you post the results on a personal Web page, send me the URL, and we'll be sure to give it a mention here.

Baiting the Hook

Let's begin this new campaign in much the same way the last one began. In the second installment of "Dungeoncraft," It was noted that a good first step in creating a new campaign is to develop a fundamental concept or "hook." What you're really searching for is the single idea or characteristic that will set your campaign apart from all the others. You know you've developed an appropriate hook when your players can effectively describe your campaign in one or two sentences. Those of you who have played D&D for some time now probably know that TSR and Wizards of the Coast published a number of official game settings over the years. Notice how easy it is to quickly describe the characteristics that make each of these settings unique? The AL QADIM setting was D&D in an Arabian land. The DARK SUN setting was D&D on a rough world that seemed to share a lot of influences with the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs. The RAVENLOFT setting was D&D in a gothic environment. The SPELLJAMMER setting was D&D in space.

The real value of a good hook is that it gives your players' imaginations something to grab onto and immediately begins to lend the game a life of its own. Any one of the hooks associated with these official D&D game worlds immediately tells you something about what sort of characters are appropriate, what sort of adventures you're likely to have, and what the world generally looks and feels like. In order to fulfill these missions, your hook must be simple and easily expressed. If it takes several paragraphs to explain why your world is unique, there is a good chance that your hook won't hit the players on a visceral level and fuel their imaginations like you want it to.

In the second installment of "Dungeoncraft," we identified five different types of effective campaign hooks.

Cultural: The world is based on a culture that is interesting and unusual. Examples include a gameworld with a Japanese flavor or a campaign set in ancient Greece. Several official D&D settings have chosen this approach, including KARA-TUR, MAZTICA, and AL QADIM.

Environment: An unusual environment dominates the gameworld. Imagine a campaign set entirely below ground or a game that takes place on a water world with a handful of tiny islands providing the only available land. Aris, the gameworld developed here previously, is based on this option—it's entirely blanketed by forests.

Classes/Races: These campaigns limit all the player characters to a single class or race. Imagine, for instance, a campaign in which all the player

characters are rogues or all the PCs are elves.

Opposition: Sometimes, basing the campaign around a particular monster or adversary can provide a workable hook. An effective gameworld might be completely dominated by undead or you might build an interesting world that is ruled by dragons.

Situation: Some effective hooks are simply the byproduct of an unusual situation that dominates the campaign setting. Imagine a gameworld that is on the brink of an impending apocalypse or a world in which the sun never rises.

Here's a sixth type of hook to add to that list.

Inspiration: Adopting the works of a specific author or artist as the inspiration for your world can sometimes provide a workable hook. Examples might include a game that features the sort of whimsical fantasy often found in the films of Terry Gilliam (such as *Time Bandits* or the *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*), or a campaign inspired by the florid fantasy of Lord Dunsany.

The New World

This time, "Dungeoncraft" is going to focus on a hook based on opposition. This new campaign setting will be dominated by dinosaurs. In fact it's a world in which there are almost no mammals, and various sorts of dinosaurs are used as mounts and beasts of burden. Imagine an enormous apatosaurus sporting war paint and carrying a battle platform on its back, or a knight mounted atop an ankylosaurus. In addition, wild and fearsome dinosaurs dominate the wilderness areas and prey upon any intruders who violate their territory. The aim here is to lend the world a "land that time forgot" atmosphere with primitive warriors wielding stone axes and struggling to survive amid harsh surroundings. Altogether, this new world will be less civilized than Aris, and its inhabitants will be a great deal more savage.

This path has several interesting implications, many of which will present some formidable design challenges.

Primitive Cultures

First and foremost, the cultures that inhabit this new world will be a great deal more primitive than those that dominate a typical D&D setting. One obvious implication of this is that there will be a much lower level of technology available than the D&D rules presume. This lost world has advanced to roughly the level of Earth's early Iron Age. While there are primitive metal swords and spears available, advanced metalworking (such as that necessary to create advanced armor types) should be almost non-existent. This will change the choice of weapons available to the players, but more importantly, it might upset the game's balance. Restricting access to the more effective armors, for instance, might radically reduce the combat effectiveness of the average party, particularly against foes like dinosaurs.

Furthermore, the lack of advanced technologies might force us to re-evaluate some of the D&D character classes. Without access to various weapons and armors, certain classes lose important capabilities and proficiencies that might throw them out of balance with the other classes. Most likely, it will be necessary to either restrict the available character classes, or grant some classes new abilities or proficiencies to make up for these liabilities.

Similarly, the primitive nature of the cultures that dominate this new world will force us to reconsider several of the D&D character races. The idea of coarse, unrefined cultures clearly contradicts the vision of elves presented in D&D, for instance. Again, it might be necessary to either limit the selection of available races, slightly rethink some of the standard races, or evolve all new races.

Magic

If you play "by the book," D&D's magic system isn't intended for this sort of primitive environment. The traditional D&D setting is dependent upon the classic notion of a wizard's workshop that is stocked with expensive laboratory equipment and dusty tomes full of arcane knowledge. Spellbooks, scrolls, and magical research all play prominent roles in the traditional setting. On this lost world, it's difficult to imagine encountering these things very often. Such primitive cultures certainly wouldn't develop many written materials of any kind, precluding an abundance of spellbooks and scrolls. Similarly, conditions are so harsh that it is difficult to imagine any but the very richest inhabitants of the planet amassing the wealth necessary to construct even a modest wizard's workshop.

Perhaps the easiest way to address these problems is to exclude magic (in the form of wizards) from the campaign altogether, or to make magic-using characters incredibly rare. Although both are perfectly valid approaches, it's usually not a good idea to alter the basic essence of the game so radically. Spellcasters and magic items give D&D a great deal of its unique flavor and play an important role in balancing the game. Removing them certainly changes the tenor of play, and it might also severely weaken the players' adventuring party, forcing the DM to take other steps to correct the problem as play progresses. For these reasons, we're going to allow spellcasters and retune the magic systems to tailor them to the new world.

Harsh Reality

As hinted, this sort of "land that time forgot" atmosphere implies a harsh world in which mere survival is difficult. Although it's already decided that the humans and other intelligent inhabitants of the world have managed to tame some of the dinosaurs, the largest and most fearsome of the creatures are still the undisputed masters of their environment. This dominance is reinforced by the humans' lack of advanced technologies and sophisticated armors. Just to clarify the intent here, we don't imagine the adventures set on this new world to be any more difficult than the standard D&D adventure. Although the going is tough, the average player character should be as durable as ever. Rather, it's civilization as a whole that struggles. The life expectancy of a common inhabitant might be as low as thirty-five. The average human tribe spends so much time fleeing reptilian predators and natural disasters (such as volcanic eruptions) that there is little time to lay down any roots. As a consequence, food is probably somewhat scarce, and many of the tools that adventurers from other worlds take for granted are relatively rare on this world.

At the same time, let's not forget that dinosaurs are formidable opponents in D&D terms. Take a look at their statistics in the new *Monster Manual*. Even a relatively small carnivorous dinosaur is more than a match for a low level

player character. If dinosaurs are common on the new world, such encounters won't be uncommon.

For these reasons, it's probably important to beef up the effectiveness of the typical beginning adventurer relative to the rest of the world's inhabitants. We'll want to make sure that the average adventuring party is capable of standing up to the occasional dinosaur and surviving the rigors that limit the population's life expectancy.

The Past

Finally, the lost world approach has one other interesting implication. A compelling and vibrant past is usually a critical component of a successful D&D game world—it's the past that propels most D&D adventures. Aren't all those dungeons usually the remnants of long dead ancient civilizations and forgotten cults? Aren't most important magic items the subject of legends that date back several centuries?

In a lost world situation, it might be difficult for the players to easily grasp the campaign's past. If the cultures that presently inhabit the world are so primitive, what could have preceded them? Cultures that were even more primitive and even less refined? How could cultures like that leave any sort of legacy or lasting ruins in their wakes? In order to make it easy to create adventures set on this new world, we'll have to pay special attention to these questions as the campaign develops and make sure to create a past capable of capturing the players' imaginations.

This brings us to the Second Rule of Dungeoncraft. Now that an important detail about the gameworld has been created (the hook), we need to create an appropriate secret that is tied to that detail. An effective secret will not only provide me with an interesting springboard for future adventures but also will go a long way toward solving the problem with the past as well. When searching for an appropriate secret, we made a list of the fundamental characteristics of dinosaurs, looking for possibilities. An obvious one immediately leapt out: Dinosaurs are extinct. Thus, the dinosaurs on this new world are on the brink of extinction themselves. As play begins, the world is undergoing a formative change. Unknown to most of its inhabitants, control of the planet is slowly but surely passing from the ancient dinosaurs over to the scrappy human upstarts. Further, the dinosaurs are somehow connected to an ancient and long-dead civilization of intelligent reptiles (lizard-folk in D&D terms). Somehow, long ago, the sorcerers of this once great civilization made a terrible mistake and unleashed some kind of terrible disaster that wiped their people from the planet and is still slowly killing off the last of the dinosaurs now. Thus, the world is probably dotted with the remnants of the lizard-folk civilization, making for some interesting adventure opportunities. As we continue to add details to the world, we'll have an opportunity to flesh out the nature of the ancient catastrophe and decide what it might mean for the modern adventurers.

Anyway, those are the most obvious problems cluttering up the road ahead. Come back in thirty days to see some solutions.

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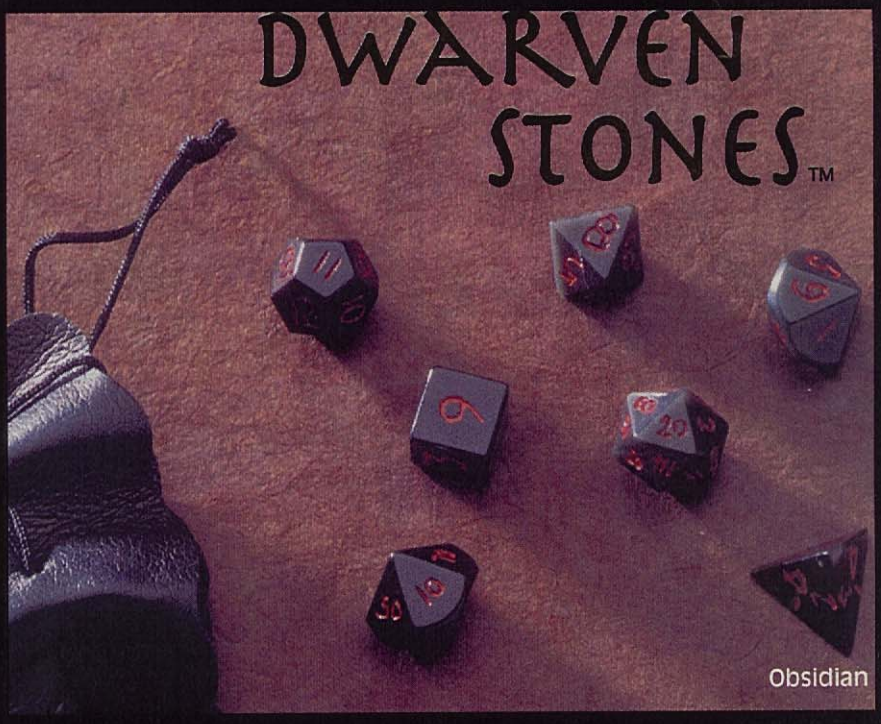

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